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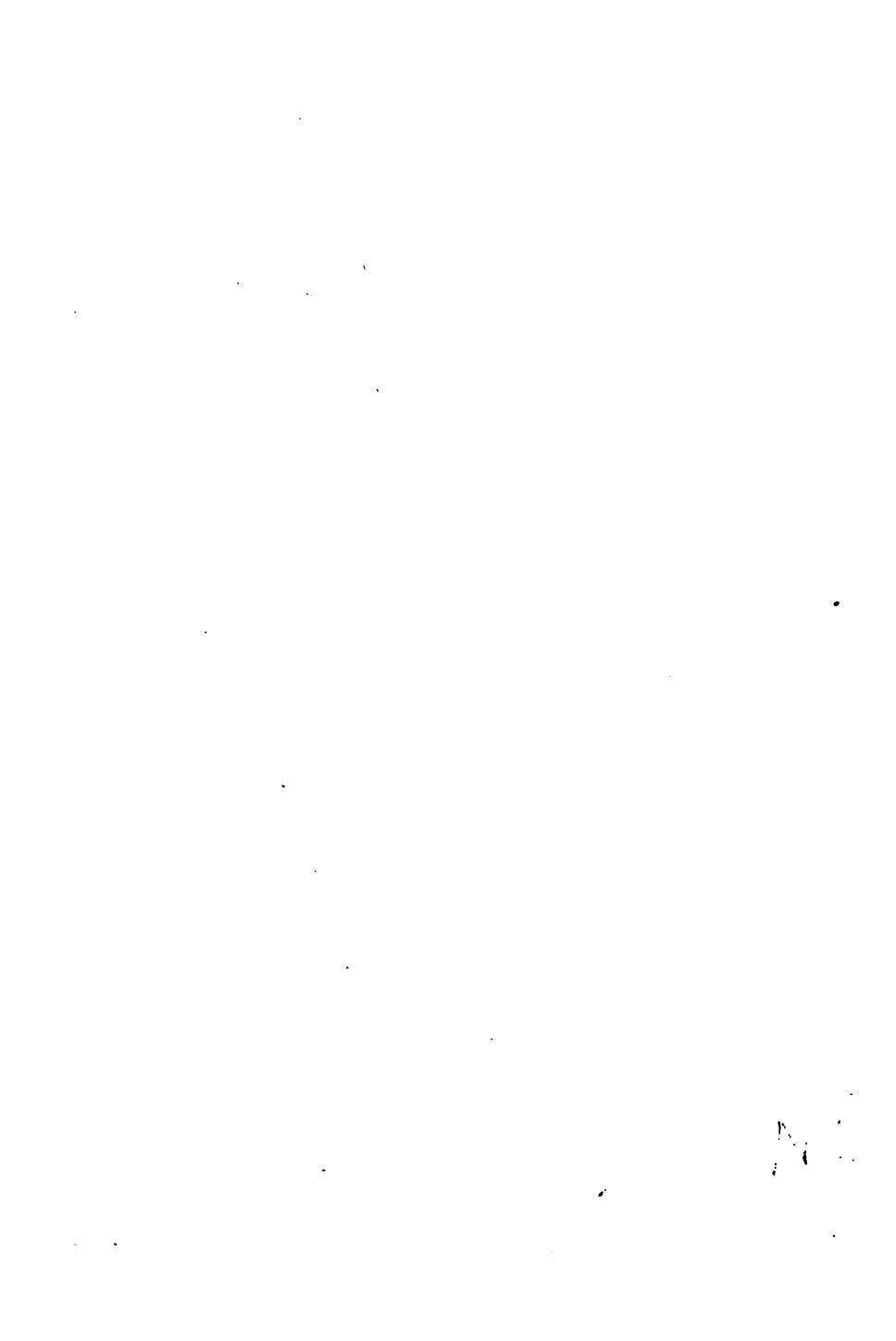
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THE GRINDING

CLARA BOISE BUS





THE GRINDING

A LOUISIANA STORY

BY

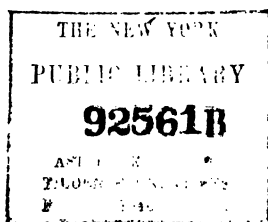
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THE GRINDING

I

THE city was throbbing with excitement. In every street where hurrying throngs of men, women, and children were converging toward a common center, the murmur of voices rolled like a rising tide. From the "river side" and the "woods' side" (as the directions in New Orleans are denominated) streams of humanity came pouring in, illumined by the glow, as of a conflagration, in the low-hanging clouds. Presently, a rocket went hissing upward from the cotton presses on the river bank and the crowd, knowing this to be the signal for the procession to start, surged forward in the universal desire to get the best position. In front of the club house at the corner of St. Charles Avenue and Clio Street, a solid mass of human beings filled every inch of available space, and every eye was fixed on the balcony where Rex and his court were to appear. A street car jangled cautiously along, and the crowd, with laughter, ejaculations, and protests, trampled upon itself in the effort to make room.

"Now ain't that awful!" a woman's indignant voice exclaimed. "They'd ought to quit running, soon's the procession starts."

"This sure has been one grand Mardi Gras!" someone said enthusiastically. "I hope it won't go and spoil everything by raining now."

"It nevaire rain on Mardi Gras," a strongly-marked Creole voice asserted. Everybody talked with everybody in this most democratic of all crowds.

"Wasn't the Rex procession elegant to-day!" a young girl asserted rather than asked. "Who's Rex this year, anyhow? I've heard two or three names."

"I reckon it's Fergus Maine," her companion hazarded.

"Now ain't that a shame?" demanded the woman who had previously criticized the car system. "They always gives everything to rich people."

"They have to," said a man's voice. "Poor people can't afford to be Rex or queen of the Carnival." Then, to the company at large, "We'd look sweet, wouldn't we, trying to be Rex?"

There was good-natured laughter interrupted by a deep voice that growled, "It's not Fergus Maine; it's Marc Sutton."

"And if it should rain they couldn't come out," said the girl who had asked about Rex.

"Don't you believe it," her escort assured her. "They'll come if it's raining cats and dogs." Then, in a lower tone, "This is the people's part of the Carnival—those who can't get invitations to the balls."

"I'd give anything on earth," the girl observed, "if I could go to the ball."

"Rex's?" the man asked in a disparaging tone. "It isn't any honor to go there. Anyone can get an invitation."

"Well, I didn't," said the girl; "and I was crazy for one."

"Did you see Miss Maine and her Maids of Honor on the Boston Club gallery to-day?" a woman asked, squeezing her shoulders around in order to speak to someone behind her.

"They say she's the prettiest girl in New Orleans," another voice asserted.

"The richest, yes," mocked the discontented woman. "Poor girls ain't chosen."

A distant strain of music was heard, and there was a universal cry of: "Here it comes!"

A flurry of rain pattered on the crowd and it assumed the appearance of a field of mushrooms. "Shut your umbrellas," called innumerable voices; "we can't see a thing."

The shower was quickly past and then there was a writhing and struggling to close umbrellas where there was insufficient elbow room. The glow in the clouds was growing brighter, the music louder, and from around Lee Circle there appeared a broad line of knights on horse back; the forerunners of Comus's procession. Forward they swept with their long spears and plumed helmets and snowy mantles embroidered with a red cross, advancing over a pavement glistening from the recent shower and reflecting the flare of the torches until it became a path of red gold.

"Crusaders!" ejaculated a boyish voice.

And now the floats appeared, towering above the heads of the crowd, led by the car of Richard Coeur de Lion in jeweled crown and mantle. Then came a long line, as fantastic as if they had moved directly out from the Arabian Nights: a phantasmagoria of gnomes, dwarfs, giants, knights, ladies, priests, and monarchs; now glittering in the electric light, now moving through shadow, gleaming with every color of the rainbow.

A deep, thrilling "Oh!" went up from the heart of the crowd.

Rex and his court now appeared on the balcony and received the tribute of a long moment of silence followed by a storm of applause. In the center of the group were Rex and his queen, attended on the right and left by excited little pages in plumes and spangles. Beyond the pages were the Maids of Honor, each with her "Duke" standing behind her. Rex, towering above all the rest, in a portentous blond wig and beard, betrayed nervousness by the occasional twitching of his shoulder and neck, as if his collar were too tight. The queen, on the other hand, a slender, dark-eyed girl, stood in an attitude of statuesque calm, her sweeping white mantle encrusted with jewels, her proud young head crowned with a circlet on which a pair of wings were a quivering suggestion of light, above her dark hair. She held her scepter with a negligent grace as if she had borne one all her life; her gaze resting from the immeasurable height of her

beauty, her wealth, her aristocratic birth, upon the populace in the street. The Maids of Honor whispered to each other and to their Dukes, but the queen was as impassive and indifferent as if her royalty were real and not the pageant of a single night. At the extreme left of the line stood May Vincent, a gentle looking girl, and behind her was George Burbank, nondescript but kindly.

"Wasn't it lovely of her to choose me?" May said over her shoulder. "I never was so surprised in my life."

"I was much pleased and flattered at her asking me," the young man confessed.

The procession went by, each float stopping to pay homage to the young queen. When all had passed, the royal party entered the ball room and, in conformity with time-honored custom, seated itself on an elevated platform while their motley guests filed by as if before a row of statues; commenting audibly on the different members of the group as they passed.

"*Mon Dieu!*" ejaculated a young girl, pausing before the queen, "but she's *lovely!* I always heard she was beautiful, but I never knew she was that pretty," and she gazed with unconcealed admiration at the young creature (a girl of her own age), seated before her like a jeweled idol in a shrine.

"Move on, can't you?" exclaimed a woman behind her. "You ain't the only one wants to see."

"Ain't Rex homely!" the irritable woman cried after pushing forward into the place of the young girl

who had shamefacedly made room; "Gracious! I wouldn't have chose him."

"He ain't so awful homely," her escort declared, moving on to examine the remainder of the group while his companion expressed her opinions as freely as if those on the platform were as far removed physically as they were socially.

In one corner of the ball room stood a group of people wrapped in cloaks and overcoats. "It's worth glancing at as a curiosity," said a gray-haired gentleman who seemed to be acting the part of guide. "This is the most cosmopolitan of all the balls. Here you may meet your valet and housemaid."

"What a beautiful girl the queen is!" said a member of the group. "I never saw a more perfect face."

"Not amiable!" observed one of the ladies.

"A little spoiled by wealth," the gray-haired man admitted. "We must go soon to get seats at the French Opera House. Rex's visit to Comus is the crowning pageant of the Carnival. It's worth seeing. But wait; they're coming down from the platform," and, sure enough, the court now descended into the ball room and moved, a glittering procession, around and around among its admiring guests.

At midnight, when all these prescribed ceremonies were finished, they left the platform and went to their waiting carriages, while the "subjects" danced away the hours until morning.

"I'll bet anything she's cross because she wasn't

queen of Comus," Belle Snively, another of the Maids, whispered to May Vincent.

"Oh, I don't think she's cross," May whispered in reply. "I suppose she's disappointed because Ronald North couldn't be here."

Belle laughed and her voice conveyed an unspoken innuendo.

They drove rapidly to the old French Opera House where they were received by the black-coated committee of prominent citizens, and escorted into the ball room. Here Comus and his queen, descending from the throne that filled the upper end of the stage, moved forward to meet them and Rex, taking the hand of Comus's queen and Comus that of Rex's, they returned to the throne followed by the attendants of both courts. The two queens were seated in the center with a king on each side and Maids and Dukes grouped to the right and left. The sleepy little pages collapsed in their plumes and spangles at the feet of their royal mistresses, and altogether it formed, as the gray-haired gentleman had prophesied, the crowning picture of the Carnival.

After they were seated facing the vast audience which reached like a rainbow cloud, tier above tier, from floor to ceiling, Comus said in a low tone to his companion, "Has it been hard? You look tired."

"I'm nearly dead, Fergus," she replied. "You know it's awful to go dragging around that way at Rex's ball."

"Try to enjoy it, Catherine," he remonstrated. "After all, it's a great thing —"

"Not to be queen of Rex," she interrupted. "You know I didn't want to be. And now I can never be queen of anything else. And you know it was as unkind as it could be for Ronald to go away and not wait a single day to see me queen for the one time of my life. I'll never forgive him as long as I live."

A group in the highest gallery was watching her through their opera glasses. "Did you ever see a prettier profile?" said one of the men. "Her color may be put on, but that line of the throat and chin is a gift of the gods."

"What glorious eyes!" another exclaimed. "But she looks sullen. I believe all these Southern girls are over-indulged. Too much is done for them. They're courted and flattered from their cradles."

"They say Adolphus Banks is in love with her," some one close by was saying. The crowd even in this highest gallery was suffocatingly dense and every remark seemed an announcement for the company.

"They say," another voice chimed in laughingly, "she's refused every unmarried man in Louisiana."

"She never refused me," the first speaker declared.

"Because you never had the chance to ask her," the other retorted, and both laughed.

Against the wall, behind the speakers, a young man stood listening. Tall, athletic, clean-limbed, with penetrating, dark-gray eyes, there was in his poise and manner a superb nonchalance as if he were here by

accident and were looking with what might possibly be a supercilious indifference at a bit of child's play unworthy of the grown-up human beings taking part in it.

But his mood was not one of indifference. He was watching the young queen intently, appraisingly, as if seeing her now for the first time. Unconscious of the attention he attracted as he stood there, the light glinting on his fair hair, he was deaf to the conjectures as to why Ronald North was not in Rex's party. Absorbed in his own thoughts, he was weighing her in the balances and finding her wanting. A coquette? A spoiled, hard-hearted beauty? Yesterday he would have denied the accusations; to-night he knew them to be true, for only a few hours ago she had dismissed him with unforgivable words after long years of devotion on his part.

Never, never should she know that he had had the weakness to come back for one more look. And now, having seen her glowing with beauty and satisfied vanity — Circe that she was! — she should never lure him back. With a last look, he left the gallery.

"She's very well acquainted with Comus, whoever he may be," observed one of the ladies who had looked in at the Rex ball.

"So I see," said the gray-haired gentleman. "He is said to be Fergus Maine, her half-brother."

"He's scolding her," said the lady. "She wants to cry."

But Comus was not scolding her. His rosy, dimpled

mask was turned toward her in expressionless prettiness, but his voice sounded troubled. "Remember how many people are watching you," it said, "and try to forget your annoyance about Ronald. You will forgive him when you know all the circumstances."

"Never!" she retorted. "And he'll be sorry when he knows something. I had a letter from Adolphus Banks again to-day."

"I hope you have done nothing rash," said Comus gravely.

"I've accepted him."

Comus regarded her in silence, and presently the kings and queens descended from the throne and, followed by their train of attendants, made the tour of the ball room, acknowledging the greetings of the many spectators who scanned them with the discrimination of long habit.

At last the ball was over. In the gray of Ash Wednesday morning, the kings and queens, their royalty ended, were beginning their forty days of Lent, and Catherine was alone with Fergus. As they walked up the broad stairs to her sitting room, he noticed that the house was a trifle over-heated and that the shaded lights, and all-pervading perfume of flowers made it seem still warmer. The thought crossed his mind that this young sister, more than a dozen years his junior, might have been enervated by her hothouse existence.

As he paused at her door, he referred to their conversation in the ball room. "Are you accepting Adolphus Banks because Ronald dislikes him?" he asked.

"Partly," she admitted.

"Cathie," he said slowly, "I'm afraid I've been unjust to you."

"Unjust!" she ejaculated, "how?"

He was very pale as he looked silently down at her and something in his expression so impressed her that the entire scene remained indelibly fixed in her mind. He was a man of medium height and build, with mild, thoughtful brown eyes under straight, dark brows. His face, which was somewhat long for its width was framed in dark hair and close-cut, VanDyke beard — an unusual thing in this day of clean-shaven faces, but a characteristic which enhanced his air of distinction. Altogether, even a casual observer would have been struck by his cultured look, betraying as it did the student and dilettante. On the wall opposite the door in which they were standing, hung a round convex mirror in a quaint, antique frame. This mirror showed, as in a picture, the vast, luxurious room with its flowers, its Oriental rugs, its dancing firelight, and in the doorway, beside her brother, her own slender figure, crowned and sceptered and robed as a queen.

His silence vexed her and she repeated: "What do you mean by 'unjust'?"

"I have over-indulged you — cruelly, I fear."

She laughed lightly. "Cruelly? Well, Ronald makes up by disappointing me cruelly. But why are you so anxious about me all of a sudden? Because I've accepted Adolphus Banks?"

"Partly; and partly because I was told some bad

news as I was leaving the ball. I must tell you before you hear it from others."

"What is it?" she asked in a startled tone.

"A terrible failure will be announced in New York tomorrow, and —"

"Oh," she interrupted, looking relieved. "I was afraid Ronald had been hurt or something serious had happened."

"But this is serious, Catherine."

"Oh, I know," she replied indifferently, "money seriousness. But people are always failing, don't you know? You can't help everybody, so let them fail if they want to," and she raised her face for his good-night kiss.

II

THE winter rain was falling, converting the heavy, alluvial soil into a thick paste through which the muffled footsteps of the mules plodded with rhythmic regularity. The solitary vehicle, broken and mud-spattered, in which Fergus and Catherine Maine were seated, crawled along through the blurred landscape, mile after mile, and hour after hour.

Finally Fergus spoke. "Are you cold, Cathie?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered with a shudder; then, after a pause, "It seems strange that someone has the right to lock us out of our own house."

He regarded her with a pained expression. As unfitted for hardship as a humming-bird, she must now face poverty and friendlessness. Worn with weeping, she was pitifully changed from the haughty Catherine whose very wilfulness had been treated as if it were an added charm. Both he and Ronald had been in the habit of mentioning her as "a spoiled child, who had never been crossed in anything." And now Life had barred her way with its relentless hand. What would become of her, he wondered with deep foreboding.

The interminable road stretched before them, fol-

lowing the windings of the bayou. On their left, sepulchral moss hung in long, gray festoons from the somber branches of the oak trees and dripped accumulated moisture; on the right, the bayou, sluggish and stealthy, so shrouded in mist that the farther bank was scarcely discernible and they might not have noticed the amphitheater of trees in which stood a tall, white cross, had not Ananias, the driver, stretched out his arm and quavered, "the Old Burying Ground."

And now two sails passed by; the first a vast square of crimson towering above the banks of the bayou, the other, white as moonlight; both gliding like shadows through the thick mist toward a bend, where they dimly perceived a faint light twinkling through the intervening foliage.

Again Ananias stretched out one arm and quavered, "Espérance."

Nearer they came and nearer until, through the ever-deepening twilight, they saw the giant pecan tree at the gate, with branches that swept the ground; the grass-grown driveway on which the leaves lay thick-strewn; the sagging steps and tottering chimneys that proclaimed the poverty and desolation of their future home.

"Fergus," Catherine asked faintly, "where are we going?"

Strange as it seems, during the nightmare of the past ten days, she had asked no questions, but like one who is passively swept along toward the fall, remained quiescent while servants and strangers came

and went; packing furniture, books, pictures, statues, everything that had gone toward making up her beautiful home; and had sent them away, some to auction rooms, some to antique shops, some — no one knew whither. It was like the sack of a captured city.

So stunned had she been by the avalanche of shame which had fallen upon them — by the torrent of newspaper accusations against Fergus — that, for the moment, material things seemed not to matter. The most treasured heirlooms, the most common necessities of their daily life were taken, and she gave no heed. Past and future alike were engulfed in the abysmal present.

No word of sympathy came from Ronald. In her numb despair, she scarcely remembered the unkindness with which she had dismissed him; but, had she remembered, it would have been no excuse for his neglect of Fergus.

And now, shut out from her world of warmth and light and laughter, alone in that chilling mist with her disgraced and ruined brother, she listened while he explained that this plantation of Espérance had been willed personally to her and was the only refuge left them in the world. He made no excuse for his own presence, knowing that she needed his company and protection.

It was deep twilight as they ascended the creaking steps, wet and weary, and were met at the door by Marcelline, the wife of Ananias, carrying a lighted candle which intensified the gloom of the great hall.

Setting the candle on a box, she helped Catherine to remove her wraps, saying, "Ef I'd a-knewn you was that wet, I'd've made a fire."

"Make it now," Catherine commanded; "but first show me to my room."

Silently Marcelline opened a door into what, in the semi-darkness, seemed an endless space; and held up the candle to enable her young mistress to avoid the row of chairs standing in front of a great, empty fireplace.

"You should have had a fire here, too," Catherine exclaimed irritably.

"They wa'n't no fire wood," Marcelline explained. "But effen you says so, I'll hunt round. I mout find some branches fer Nias to break up."

"Why, of course," said Catherine, astonished at the stupidity of servants who would permit their mistress to come into so cold and damp a house; and Marcelline withdrew with many forebodings as to the city ways of the newcomers.

Fergus entered, carrying a lighted lantern. "This has been a fine room in its day, Cathie," he said with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Look at the windows, and the height of this mantel-piece. And that bed is handsome," regarding the massive mahogany bedstead which stood, half-revealed, in the sombre depths.

"Yassir," said Ananias, who came in at this moment with an armful of branches and bits of wood. "That war Miss Ludovine's." He knelt on the hearth

and began the task of lighting the damp twigs. "She die there, it mout be fifty year ago."

"Mercy!" Catherine ejaculated faintly.

"An' 'fore that," he continued, pausing now and then to blow the feeble flame, "this war you-all's great-granmaw's room; she that war Miss Félicie Trosclair. An' she fell down daid, right by that winder, when they tole her young Mars Raoul had kilt hisself."

Catherine was helplessly exploring a valise, in search of dry clothing, and paid scant attention to the old man's words.

"An' yonder," he continued, having rearranged the kindling and shoved a bit of crackling corn husk under the driest part, "in that yuther room," nodding toward an open door, "is whar they foun' the ole marster a-settin', daid in his cheer, arter him an' his overseer, Kazim Blaise, had ben a-playin' cards all night. Kazim Blaise war gone, an' the deed to more'n half of Espérance war gone with him. Poof! Poof!" with another effort to encourage the smouldering flame.

Catherine, still groping in her valise and dropping various articles on the floor, now gave up in despair. "Never mind about that fire," she said. "It ought to have been built hours ago. It doesn't do any good now. Besides, I want the room."

"Yas'm! Yas'm!" Ananias acquiesced, rising stiffly to his feet. "Does you want some supper?"

"No," she replied impatiently, "I wish only to be alone."

“Yas’m,” he replied humbly. **“An’ what time does you want you mornin’ coffee? Marcelline kin have it ready any time. Five o’clock? She kin be ready by half-pas’ four — er sooner, effen you likes.”**

“For mercy sakes!” Catherine ejaculated. **“The man’s crazy, Fergus.”**

“I suppose they are accustomed to early hours on the plantation,” Fergus explained, and, turning to the crestfallen Ananias, he said: **“Seven o’clock will be early enough for me, and I don’t think Miss Catherine will care for hers before nine. Shall you, Cathie?”**

“Nine!” she repeated wearily. **“You know I never get up as early as that. I’ll ring for it when I want it.”**



III

IN spite of her weariness, Catherine could not sleep. The old house was full of strange noises. She was wrapped in unaccustomed darkness and heard sighings and whisperings all around her. A finger tapped gently at the shutter by her bed; a footfall rustled stealthily among the withered leaves on the gallery; the stairs that led down from the upper story creaked, one after the other. Surely someone was descending from those unexplored upper rooms! Every faculty of her mind was strained to increase her sense of hearing. Was that a hand, laid cautiously on the knob of her door? There was no lock! Her blood turned to ice. She held her breath and thought of the stories Ananias told of her long-dead ancestors. Who was standing by her bedside in the impenetrable darkness, looking at her with eyes that pierced the blackness of the night? She dared not call to Fergus; she dared not move to cover her head with the bed clothes. The long moments crept by until, at last, the tension of her nerves gave way from sheer weakness. The scalding tears trickled down her cheeks and soaked her pillow.

With daybreak she fell asleep and then came Marcelline bringing hot, black coffee, and the comforting news that Miss Victorine (whoever that might be), had sent over some things for breakfast, thinking the

Madam might not yet have been able to provide herself with everything necessary to begin housekeeping in the country.

Later, "Miss Victorine" herself appeared, dressed in a stiffly-starched Guinea blue calico dress and white sunbonnet. A tiny, dried-up slip of a woman fifty-five or sixty years of age, she welcomed "Mees Catrine" to *Espérance* in a cheerful, ringing voice and offered assistance in getting settled. Catherine thanked her in a perfunctory manner, assured her she should not hesitate to ask for help if necessary, and then expected her to leave. But no! Good manners on the bayou demanded that Miss Victorine should stay at least two hours, and Catherine, not understanding this infliction, grew restive, listened with open indifference to remedies for the diseases of cows and chickens and minute directions for the making of lard. She interrupted a detailed account of the best methods for slaughtering hogs, at new moon, or even at the full, but never later in the month, by saying: "We'll not keep any of those things. I shall buy eggs and milk and I don't expect to use pork or lard."

Miss Victorine looked wonderingly at her. What sort of person was this who did not wish to keep cows and chickens and who did not expect to use pork or lard? Very patiently she explained to Catherine the difficulty of buying fresh provisions in the country, and the need of laying in a sufficient supply. Very impatiently Catherine listened, bidding her a careless good-by when all this good advice was ended, and

turning indifferently away, unconscious that she had wounded the kindest of neighbors and friends.

At their noon dinner, she told Fergus of the infliction. "Who is she, any way?" she asked. "I'm afraid she's going to be very intrusive."

A faint red crept into his cheeks and he spoke hesitatingly, with a deprecating look at his young sister, who had never been forced to tolerate good advice. She leaned forward, her slender, interlaced fingers resting on the table edge, apparently as aloof from her sordid surroundings as she had seemed from the populace in the street.

"Do you suppose," she asked, "that all country people are as tiresome as Miss Victorine?"

"Perhaps," he ventured guardedly, "you won't find her tiresome when you have interests in common."

"Interests in common!" Catherine ejaculated. "Do you mean to imply that I'll ever be interested in such things as she talked about? Slaughtering hogs, and making lard, and doctoring chickens?"

"Perhaps, sometime —" he began.

"Fergus," she exclaimed, "do you really think I'll ever be like that?" She gazed at him horror-struck. "Do you suppose she was ever like me and turned into that from living here on the bayou?"

"No," he replied, "she could never have been like you. But, Cathie, we have to learn new standards. We must estimate people altogether by what they are, and —"

"I always have," she interrupted, leaning her elbows

on the table and resting her chin on her clasped hands. "I've always scorned liars and sycophants and ungrateful, dishonest people."

"Yes," he agreed, seeing his opportunity. "And we are really under obligations to Miss Victorine and her son Placide. They have taken care of this place from time immemorial. Her husband took care of it until his death, and since then her son has faithfully filled his place. I think father left a sum in perpetuity for necessary implements and stock, and they were paid by the usufruct of the land."

"Oh, yes," said Catherine indifferently; "stewards. I don't see that there's any occasion for gratitude there. They were paid by that usufruct — whatever that was."

"And it was Miss Victorine who sent Marcelline and Ananias from the fields to help us. Otherwise, we should have had no servants."

Catherine gazed at him with sudden comprehension. "Why," she acknowledged, "I never thought of that. There wouldn't have been any servants here if she hadn't sent them? Yes, that was thoughtful of her." She was lost in wonder at such possibilities. "What should we have done, Fergus?" she questioned. "What do people do under such circumstances?"

"I suppose they do their own work," he replied.

"'Their own work,'" she repeated slowly. "How awful! I couldn't. I don't know how." Rising, she went to the window and stood looking out into the neglected garden,

Day after day passed — each like the preceding one — and day after day, Catherine wandered listlessly back and forth on the gallery, or sat and waited for time to pass in this land of abysmal silence and solitude. Whenever Fergus came in from his study of the fields and swamps, of the ruined sugar house, the brackish bayou, the perplexing boundaries between *Espérance* and the neighboring plantation of Gold Mine, she bemoaned her discomforts and the unutterable monotony of her life.

One day as they were sitting, silent, at their noon dinner, the unusual sound of wheels was heard. Fergus set down his glass and listened. "That must be Placide Chauvin," he said. "He's going to take me to see the new bridge at Bayou Blanc."

They listened apprehensively, with the unspoken fear that their creditors were pursuing them even to this remote place.

"My jewels covered all my personal debts, you said, didn't you?" she whispered. He nodded without speaking.

And now footsteps were heard on the gallery, the outside door was flung open, and Ronald's voice called, "Where are you all?"

Ronald's voice! With an inarticulate cry, Catherine flew to meet him.

"You don't know how glad I am to see you!" he said over and over. "I thought I'd never get here. I thought the driver had missed the way. I was afraid to ask about you — I was afraid —" His voice trem-

bled. "When any one has endured what you have —" He stopped, unable to say more.

"You see, Fergus," Catherine cried, "he hadn't forgotten us."

"Forgotten you!" He looked from one to the other.

"We hoped for a letter, soon," Fergus explained.

"A *letter!*" Ronald repeated. "Fergus, did you actually think I'd wait to write? I telegraphed as soon as I landed. Grace Fessenden telegraphed too, but we couldn't find out where you were. Marc Sutton neglected to answer my wire"—His lips stiffened as he spoke. "I learned through the papers what had happened. I couldn't believe my eyes." He turned very white as he spoke.

"You had not heard from me?" Fergus asked.

"Not a word, and when I reached New Orleans Marc Sutton was off on a fishing trip and at first I couldn't find out where you were."

"Oh, Ronald," Catherine exclaimed piteously, "people weren't rude to you were they?"

A peculiar expression swept across his face, but he merely said, "I'll never forget George Burbank's kindness. He made me stop with him. I was going to the club — but he took me with him, and he attended to everything. Found my letters for me at Sutton's office. Marc had neglected to forward them. Burbank knew where you were — and a brother couldn't have been kinder. And now we're all together, we're all right. Here, Auntie," to Marcelline, who entered

at that moment, "I'm starving. I want some of those corn dodgers. I haven't seen anything like them since I don't know when. Bring a heap, won't you?"

Dropping a courtesy, she withdrew, her face wreathed in smiles, and from that moment she began to love her new employers.

"How long can you stay with us?" Fergus asked.

"Forever."

"Ronald," said Fergus, "you must not ruin your life through mistaken generosity. Remember, we have no right to drag you down."

"No," Fergus said quietly, "one can't be too good. erosity, cut Ronald to the quick. Why had he "no right"? In an impersonal way, he knew that his father, going on a diplomatic mission, had taken his mother with him, leaving their only child with his guardian, Ferdinand Maine, Fergus's father. They were lost at sea and he had remained with his adoptive parents. Too young to feel any loss, he had grown up in the gentlest surroundings, vaguely proud of his brilliant father, and revering his mother's memory as a beatific vision, lovely and unreal as the angels. The young stepmother who came into the family a few years later, made no difference between him and Fergus, and when a baby sister was born, he rejoiced with the others. He belonged with them by the strong tie of life-long affection — why, then, should he not suffer with them? Furthermore, he believed he was needed at Espérance. While angrily rejecting the published accusations, in the depths of his soul there lurked a


doubt (smother it as he would) that Fergus could manage his affairs unaided. He had always been a dreamer, gentle, charitable, unworldly, immersed in his studies. What wonder that, at a time of financial unrest, his business affairs, left unquestioningly to others, should have suffered shipwreck! Yes, at every sacrifice, Ronald felt he must stand by those whom he had loved all his life.

Fergus's voice broke in on his abstraction. "You must not be quixotic," it said, "and give up your appointment to be with us."

"Oh, my appointment?" He spoke with an effort. "I failed to get it," and he did not add (what was true), that there was a possibility of his obtaining a still more desirable one, had he felt free to accept it.

"Failed!" the others exclaimed in a breath.

Impatiently, he tossed back a lock of blond hair that had fallen upon his forehead. It seemed to him as if he were rousing from sleep, as if he had been a long time silent, so deep was the moment of abstraction in which his mind ran over the past. "Yes, I failed. Frankly, I was as much astonished as any one. But let's not talk about it." He spoke in a tone of forced gaiety, but his face was pale, and his gray eyes under their level brows looked dark and stern. There was evidently something he was keeping back and Fergus believed that his disgrace had had a share in this terrible disappointment. That Ronald, always triumphant in everything, should have failed in this most important particular, was too incredible, too over-



whelming a catastrophe to put into words. It seemed to typify the complete ruin and downfall of the entire family, and the three sat silent while the clock on the mantel-piece ticked away the moments toward eternity.

Ronald broke the silence. "And where should I be, Fergus," he asked, "but with you who have always been so good to me? You've been too good," he added. "That was your only fault."

"No," Fergus said quietly, "one can't be too good. One can be too weak and credulous — but that isn't goodness. I know now that it is a vicious thing, when a man has the great responsibility of wealth, to drift along, trusting to others; not investigating and learning for himself whether people are trustworthy or not. Spending his time, as I did, in collecting, in writing articles of no practical value to the world. All that is a roundabout expression for a fool, I take it. I know all the kind things you wish me to believe; but the fact remains, I did not watch your interests as I ought."

"My interests!" Ronald exclaimed quickly; "I had none except those you gave me. I have always been proud of my father, but I know he was not a rich man. No, you can't accuse yourself of neglecting any interests of mine. I know that you were over-indulgent toward me. I imagine, if your father had lived, I should not have played the rôle of rich man's son at school, as I did. Your father was doubtless made of sterner stuff than you are."

"He ought to have included you in his will," Fergus interposed.

"Not at all. I ought to have made my own way in the world. I believe, now, it would have been wiser for me to work my way through school."

"Oh, Ronald!" Catherine cried in a shocked tone.

"Yes," he repeated, "I'd have been more manly; and there was nothing to be ashamed of. My father's short life was as brilliant as possible, and I must try to be worthy of him. But you, Fergus, never failed me in my life. I wonder how many foolish scrapes you helped me out of when I didn't dare confess to your father."

"You were never cowardly," Fergus declared. "Mischievous, but straightforward. And it was natural you should come to me; I am so much older than you. I ought never to have lost sight of your future."

"Fergus," Ronald said eagerly, "your influence has been the strongest factor for good in my whole life." He took Fergus's hand in a strong clasp. "If there is any good in me," he added, "it is due to you. I'm no longer a child. It's time for me to show if there is any manhood in me, and I shall never leave you," (He spoke rapidly as if half ashamed of his emotion.) "never, Fergus, so long as I can be any help to you."

IV

THE morning after Ronald's arrival, Marcelline appeared with a small, inky-black boy who said his name was Pidgeon, that he was "Mr. Peter's niece," and that Mr. Fergus had sent him to "help regulate the house." So Catherine, to whom it seemed nothing incongruous that she should have servants to do her work, looked on with languid interest while Marcelline, Ananias, and Pidgeon knocked down dirt-daubers' nests, scrubbed the floors, and arranged the scanty furniture. The house was of the type best adapted to that semi-tropical climate; with broad hall, flanked by square, lofty rooms, and ending in a spacious dining-room. There was a very steep, narrow stairway leading to the upper floor where the arrangement of the lower one was repeated.

"There must have been more furniture here at some time," Catherine observed as they moved a heavy armoire into a more convenient position. "People couldn't live this way, you know."

"Yas'm, they use' to be plenty furniture here," said Marcelline. "Fore the wah', this were one er the fines' furnish' places in the parish."

"The soldiers didn't come down this far, did they? "

"Yas'm, they was plenty soldiers all thoo these parts; wa'n't they, Nias? " Marcelline replied.

Ananias murmured some unintelligible reply and Marcelline explained, "Yas'm, they was plenty soldiers, Nias say, but they didn't bother Espérance none."

"How did you happen to be named Ananias?" Catherine asked, dismissing the subject of the lost furniture.

"Hit war his paw's name, an' his gran-paw's. Hit are a Bible name," Marcelline explained reverently.

For some time they worked in silence, then Marcelline, who had discovered to her astonishment that Catherine's trunks were still unpacked, asked, "Does you want us to fix you room 'fore you puts away you clo'es?"

"Oh, I don't know," Catherine answered indifferently; "yes, fix it," and she strolled out on to the gallery to watch for Fergus and Ronald. It was so lonely in this silent land where nothing ever happened. So desperately lonely! In the deep blue vault of the sky, three or four buzzards were sailing slowly around in vast circles, their wings outspread and motionless; on the highroad by the gate of Espérance, a cluster of lean cows huddled cheerlessly; on the opposite bank of the bayou, a straggling collection of cabins that comprised the "quarters" seemed sagging toward their fall. Starting up from the step on which she had seated herself, she cried, "There's nothing, nothing, nothing to do in this God-forsaken land!" and Ronald appearing at this moment, she flew to meet him. Claspng her slender hands about his arm, she clung

to him as they came up the path. It seemed to give her courage merely to feel that strong arm in her grasp. "What have you been doing?" she asked.

"We're going over all the details of the place; the necessary expenditures and the possible assets," he answered in a tone of studied indifference. "It gives one a thrill to be working against such odds. It's like being on the losing side of a game and gradually seeing your side gain ground."

"But if you shouldn't gain?"

"We'll not admit such a possibility. It's a stiff enough pull at best. We don't need to put any brakes on; and if we all work with a will, we'll pull out."

"If you'll teach me bookkeeping, I'll go over to the sugar house and help," she volunteered.

"You couldn't do that," he replied.

"Why not?" she demanded.

"Do you know the multiplication table?" he asked, meaning to speak banteringly; but as she glanced up she saw that his face was pale and set, and her mind flew back to their last interview in the city. Perhaps he was himself conscious of his harsh tone, for he tried to change the current of their talk by asking what she had been doing all the morning.

"Nothing," she answered drearily. "There isn't a thing to do to kill time." Her hands slipped from his arm and he seemed not to notice it.

"Do you want to show me the house while we're waiting for Fergus?" he asked as they mounted the steps. Fate had dragged him back to her, he re-

flected; now he must be man enough to protect himself against her wiles, without adding in any way to her undeniable trials and hardships.

"There isn't anything interesting in this hideous old house," she replied to his question. "Did you ever see such stairs? You have to step up a yard each time. It's like climbing a ladder."

"Ax-hewn boards," he said, stooping to examine them. "This house must be very old. I wish we knew all about it."

"We do," she answered. "We know that every day has been exactly like every other day for a hundred years and will be for a hundred years to come." In her exacting affection, she had always made undue demands upon him; trying to dictate his opinions, occupations, friendships. For her, it was quite enough that he should be golf champion, and that his rows and rows of silver cups should be more numerous than those of his idle-busy companions and friends. Now she saw that he had withdrawn from her influence; his very appearance, blond and stalwart as a Viking, with a trace of the Viking relentlessness, his very look, showed that there was something at stake. But she little dreamed what a sacrifice he had made in coming to their assistance.

Pausing at the door of the room which he had occupied the night before, he regarded the scattered clothing, the unmade bed, the general air of discomfort. "I must learn not to throw my things around that way,"

he commented, and crossing to the window, looked out.

"Some one will make up the room after a while, I suppose," she replied. It did not occur to her that she had any responsibility in the matter. What else were servants for, except to keep their masters comfortable? Vaguely, she regretted the absence of Mrs. Barrow, the housekeeper who had had charge ever since the death of Catherine's mother, but somehow, it seemed to her, *Espérance* could take care of itself. Her real discomfort at the moment rose not from the general household wretchedness, but from the uneasy conviction that Fergus had told Ronald of her engagement to Adolphus Banks. She wished now she had not acted so impulsively, remembering too late that Ronald had accused him of falsehood and dishonesty at the club. Still, she asked herself, with the innate propensity to make light of her own wrongdoings, how could she know that she should ever be so thrown upon Ronald for companionship? And a promise, given by letter, seemed so easily broken; how could she know it would so complicate matters for her? "Some one ought to have done the work by this time," she declared after a long pause. She was not a stupid girl, but the change in her circumstances had been so sudden she had not yet been able to visualize herself in these surroundings, and did not discern what should have been her share in the burden they were carrying. "There isn't anything I can do," she added, "if you won't teach me bookkeeping."

"Oh!" he ejaculated. It was little more than a sharp exhalation of the breath, but it sounded so impatient that she pressed her lips together to prevent their quivering. Never before had any one spoken impatiently to her.

"I suppose," he said, "country girls have to learn to do housework and take care of cows and chickens."

"And hogs?" she asked in sudden exasperation. "You're as bad as Miss Victorine."

"Like enough," he agreed with apparent carelessness. "That's a cunning little top-heavy church over yonder. And did you ever see handsomer pecans?" indicating a clump of trees on the farther side of the bayou. "And look! Sometime or other, there's been an orchard and a flower garden. Look at those climbing roses."

Marcelline knocked on the frame of the open door. "Miss Catrine," she said, "the peddler's cart are a-comin'. What kind er meat will I get fer you-alls dinner?"

"Turkey," she replied promptly, pleased that Ronald should see her resourcefulness.

"He don't carry no tukkey. M'sieur Poisson will fotch aroun' some tukkey, effen you wishes."

"Well, chicken."

"He don't have no chicken. M'sieur Poisson —"

"What does he have?"

"He don't have nothin' but pork meat these days."

"For mercy's sake!" said Catherine. "Very well, get vegetables and fruit."

"He don't have no vegetables these days; lessen you orders some garlic fer the nex' time he come down the bayou."

"Oh! not garlic! Fruit!" Catherine exclaimed, turning impatiently away and looking out of the window once more.

Marcelline stepped to the head of the stairs and said to Ananias, waiting at the foot, "Tell M'sieur Bergeron to fotch the Madam some banana nex' time he come round."

"Not bananas!" Catherine cried. "Pineapples and strawberries."

Marcelline stood amazed. "He don't carry —" she began, but Catherine was not listening.

"That house by the church looks homelike, with its broad gallery, doesn't it?" said Ronald. "I suppose it's the priest's house."

At this moment a tall, angular woman emerged from its side door: a grotesque figure in her voluminous blue skirt, her pale pink waist, and her hair done in strange protuberances like incipient horns.

"Look at that creature!" Catherine exclaimed.

"That are Miss Delicia, Père Ignace's sister," Marcelline explained from the rear.

"Miss Delicia!" said Ronald. "What a misnomer."

"Yassir," Marcelline agreed without comprehending his words, "she are a very garmentdizing lady. She ain't friendly to scarcely nobody, an' she ain't keerin' fer nothin' but fine clo'es an' such."

"So she is Mrs. Grundy," Ronald observed.

"No, sir," Marcelline corrected him, "she are Miss Delicia LeBreton. They ain't no Miss Grundy on this bayou, lessen she be above Bergerac. I doesn't know them plantation so good."

"Yes," said Ronald, looking amused, "probably Mrs. Grundy must live in the neighborhood of Bergerac. Look, Catherine, at that house crouching among the trees. Is that the last house between here and the Gulf, Aunt Marcelline?"

"No, sir," she replied in a tone of surprise. "They's Dr. Bonvillain's, an' the Settlement, an' M'sieur Evariste Ledoux's, an' the Trosclairs' Malabar, an —"

"The Trosclairs'," Ronald interrupted. "Where have I heard that name?"

"They is you kin people," Marcelline explained. "You-alls great-gran'maw were a Miss Félicie Trosclair, an' it were fer another Miss Félicie Trosclair you-alls far-back uncle, Mr. Raoul, kilt hisself right yere in this room. You kin 'scern the spot er his blood on the floor till yet."

"Does his ghost ever come back?" Ronald inquired. Then, to Catherine, "Wouldn't it be jolly if it did? He could tell us all about this house."

"No, sir," Marcelline answered firmly. "Ner I doesn't crave to meet up with no ghoses; me."

Ronald now straightened himself from examining the spot. "I'm afraid it's nothing but dirt," he said.

"No, sir," Marcelline repeated, "'Taint no dirt.

Folks has tried plenty times to scrub that up, but nothin' won't never move the stain when humans sheds they own blood." Then, after a deferential pause, "Does you keer to order anythin' else, Miss Catrine, scusin' the pork meat an' coffee an' corn pone?"

"No!" said Catherine, "but what a menu! We'll starve to death."

"You won't," Ronald said in a low tone. "Fergus tells me you are going to marry Adolphus Banks." Then, after a moment, and with an evident effort, "I never knew you loved him."

She was crimson to the roots of the hair as she answered, "I like him better than —"

"Than whom?" he asked sharply.

"Than any of the other men in our set."

"May I ask the reason for your preference?"

"I considered him more disinterested than any of the others," she answered, at a loss for any other explanation.

"Why did you believe that?" he demanded. Then, as she made no reply, "I am asking for information. You must have some reason for your belief in him."

She was trying to frame an answer that would justify her conduct, when he broke into her thoughts with a short laugh. "Disinterested!" he repeated. "Adolphus Banks, disinterested! It's funny how women reason. Well, he has the chance to show it now for the first time, and it's a good thing at least that you are going to escape the poverty for which you are so ill-fitted."

"How am I going to escape poverty?" she demanded. "You know he's poor."

"He has a good salary."

"A good salary? For what?"

Ronald hesitated for the fraction of a second, then said, "He gained the appointment for which I was trying."

"Adolphus Banks has your appointment?"

"Not mine; I failed."

"Oh, Ronald!" she exclaimed in a smothered voice, repressing her tears, "I'm sorry."

V

THE conversation with Ronald left Catherine distinctly miserable. Hitherto, she had pursued her own line of conduct without regard to consequences, secure in the knowledge that any concession on her part would enable her to escape retribution. Now she had failed. Her utmost effort, her tears even, had left him unmoved. He cared for nothing now but efficiency. Her understanding of this word was vague in the extreme, but in the same volatile spirit in which she would formerly have taken up music or dancing or embroidery, she determined to become efficient. In her own way, of course, which did not include the milking of terrible, horned cattle; but which might mean the putting away of her own clothes.

She was jamming a pair of high-heeled slippers on to a shelf beyond her reach when Marcelline entered.

"Ain't you tired, honey?" the old woman asked in her deep, gentle voice.

"I'm nearly dead," Catherine acknowledged, sinking down into a rocking chair. "I didn't know housework was so hard."

"I reckon not," said Marcelline, "and I laid off to help you soon's I could. Pidgeon'll do the dishes fer me." She began taking out the dresses and, with a

natural instinct for order, folding and laying them on a shelf. "You clo'es is mighty ticklesome an' tearable," she commented. "You has to be mighty keerness when you wears 'em, doesn't you, so's not to spile 'em?"

Catherine looked questioningly at the heap Marcelline was arranging. "It seems to me there are very few things," she said. "I don't see anything but old, worn out evening gowns and such rubbish. I wonder what became of my street dresses."

"They mout be yere," said Marcelline, stooping to drag a large white velvet box from under the bed. On the lid, the word "Rex" glittered in jeweled letters.

Catherine came over to look, and, as she did so, gave an uncontrollable sob. "They're my Rex jewels, Marcelline," she said.

With a hasty glance over her shoulder, the old woman observed in an undertone, "Better not shine 'em roun' yere too much. Folks ain't got no call to keep too many jewels in the kentry. They's mischievious people —"

"Oh, they're not real," Catherine explained. "They're only Rhinestones, don't you know?"

Rhinestone or adamant, they were all one to Marcelline, and without opening the box, she pushed it back under the bed, saying, "Hit'll be safe there fer a spell, an' Mr. Placide mout know some good place." Then she began folding a pile of gauzy garments and laying them on the bed.

"Do you mean Mr. Placide Chauvin?"

"Yas'm; Miss Victorine's son. Her ole man were name' Mr. Placide too, an' he sure were a *planter*," she added with emphasis. "He war some kin to Noré Pinel an' Noré Pinel sure were one planter man."

"Is he dead?"

"More'n a hundred year, I reckon, but he use' to live hereabouts, an' he sure could plant. He use' to talk with the birds an' the beasts, an' he knowed fum them when they was to be high water or a freeze, and bad weather never cotch him."

"I wish he were here now," Catherine said, "to teach Mr. Fergus."

"Oh, hush, honey," Marcelline exclaimed glancing over her shoulder, "'taint never good to wish dead folks would come; they mout. My gran-maw she liv' down to Malabar, an' the ole Madam, (not Madam Élysee Trosclair, but her maw-in-law) were turr'ble wicked. An' time she come to die, my gran-maw were alone with her in that big house, an' it were a-stormin' an' a-rainin' an' the ole Madam were a-dyin' all by herself, with nobody there ceppen my gran-maw, an' she weren't nothin' but a little mite er a nigger, them days. The ole Madam were turrible purty in her young days, an' Mr. Raoul here to Espérance kilt hisself case she disappoint him an' marry her cousin down to Malabar."

"I remember," said Catherine.

"Yas'm; I done tole you 'bout that. Well, they allows as how his ghos' hants Malabar twel yit. I

don't know, me, case I ain't never seed it — ner I don't crave to. Some say it have always been a liggeroo, (" loup garou "), an' no fer true ghos', but my gran-ma say pintedly it were Mr. Raoul fum Espérance. Well that night, she that were the purties' on the whole bayou in her young days, were a-dyin'. My gran-maw were a-settin' on the floor, side er the baid. The fire were a-bu'nin' an' the room were all a red light, ceppin the great, black shadder of the ole Madam's bed. They weren't a sound in the whole house ceppin the moanin' er the wind an' a drap er water that kep' a-fallin' an' a-drappin' somewheres in the shadder. My gran-maw were beginnin' to nod when the ole Madam say: ' Sauvage, (that were all the name my gran-maw ever had), I has ben lonely all my life sence Raoul Maine kilt hisself fer me. I wisht he was here.' An' with that, a shadder come a-stretchin' acrost the ceilin' like someone were a-standin' to the foot of the baid. My gran-maw jump up fum where she were a-settin', an' she chunk the fire an' move the cheers away so they couldn't cast no shadders, an' then she go an' set down agin; an' the shadder fade away, an' my gran'maw begin ter nod, an' the wind moan, an' the clock in the hall tick, an' I reckon my gran'maw drap off asleep fer a minute, when suthin' tech her arm, like she were a-dreamin' of ice, it were so cold. It were the ole Madam's hand, and the other were a-pintin' up to where the shadder stretch acrost the ceilin' agin, like someone werè a-standin' to the foot of the baid. My gran-maw set still like she were froze, an' her

Madam's hand slip off, an' the shadder fade away. But, Miss Catrine, my gran'maw seen suthin' else. When that shadder glide away, they were another shadder with it."

A gust of wind slammed the batten shutter. "The weather's changin'," she said, opening the shutter and then closing the sash. "I 'lowed to Nias this mornin' these warm days couldn't las' much longer."

When Fergus and Ronald came plodding wearily homeward, the cold rain was falling. Pidgeon had made an attempt at building a fire in the dining room and as the three gathered about their cheerless supper table, dimly lighted by the smoking lamp, gusts of wind shook the casements and a cloud of smoke came whirling down the chimney. Catherine's mind reverted to the legend of Sauvage at Malabar and she told it to the sound of rain beating against the windows.

"It was a wild night," she repeated dramatically.

"Like to-night, I suppose," said Ronald. "Hark how the wind moans. It sounds like a human voice."

"Strange how those legends persist," Fergus commented. "I remember hearing the story about Malabar when I was a little boy. It used to frighten me dreadfully."

Catherine leaned forward listening, her slender hands, as exquisite as those of a child, clasped in a characteristic attitude. Her face, grown thin during the past weeks, white and clear as a cameo. "I love to hear those legends about Malabar," she said, "I wish I could go there."

"Undoubtedly you can if you wish," Fergus replied. "They are really our relatives although distant ones. But I fear you would find them very unsatisfactory. Totally provincial and unaccustomed to meeting people."

"I want to," she repeated. "They fascinate me."

"The legends about Espérance might be just as interesting if we knew them," Ronald observed, his gaze directed toward Fergus, but taking in Catherine in her white satin evening gown and coral colored shoulder scarf — so inappropriate for her present surroundings and so indicative of her childish vanity, as he forced himself to remember. Knowing nothing of her depleted wardrobe, he believed her costume to be another proof of the unquenchable coquetry which wished to retain its hold over him, even while it claimed the allegiance of his personal enemy, Adolphus Banks. "She sided with him against me in a question of veracity," he thought, while his soul grew hot within him, and for the hundredth time he repeated to himself her expression, "At least he's disinterested."

Fergus, on the other hand, who loved her with an almost paternal affection, looked anxiously at her. "You are cold, Cathie," he said. "You look very pale," and rising he crossed the room to close the door that had swung noiselessly open. Pausing at the uncurtained window he looked out into the darkness. "It's turning bitterly cold," he exclaimed, and shuddered involuntarily.

VI

THE opportunity to visit Malabar came sooner than expected. The morning after she had told the story about Sauvage, when Fergus and Ronald had gone to their work, Catherine, forgetting her new plan of efficiency, was walking listlessly back and forth on the front gallery, glancing now and then at the high road where the wind was raising little eddies of dust, and where, at long intervals, a cart creaked by on its way to the distant village of Bergerac. She had nothing to read, for those who did the packing had not included books. In fact, they had sent nothing but a heterogeneous mass of old evening wraps, tea gowns, high-heeled slippers, broken opera glasses, and so on. One noticeable characteristic was that all the garments were out of date, and she wondered from what ancient cedar chest they had been unearthed. Thinking casually of this matter, she slipped her hands into her sleeves and clasped her elbows to keep them warm as she walked back and forth, counting her steps. What did people do to pass the time in the country, she wondered, then resumed her counting: "Five hundred and one, five hundred and two, five hundred and three." Her high-heeled slipper turned and she twisted her ankle. As she stopped and rubbed it, she was still

wondering what people did to pass the weeks and months and years of their lives. How long time was, any way, she thought. How interminably long! Of course, she had been in country places before, but they had always been the elaborately rural resorts prepared for rich people. "Camps" fitted up with electric lights and telephones and motor cars and with trained, liveried servants to anticipate every wish.

Marcelline appeared at the door. "Miss Catrine," she asked, "does you want some one to do your washin'?"

"Why, of course!" Catherine replied, astonished that one must plan such elementary things as having one's washing done. She had noticed that her piles of clean clothing were nearly exhausted, but that had suggested nothing to her.

"Chukey Nightshed say she kin do it," Marcelline suggested hesitatingly. "She say she are right han'-some at washin'—but you know she are a Ab'aham Lingcum nigger."

"A what?"

"A Ab'aham Lingcum nigger — born sence the war; you know they is all right, Miss Catrine, but they isn't as well train' as the Jeff Davis niggers."

"Oh, I don't care. Have her do it."

"In our wash house?"

"Yes, yes; I don't care where."

"Does you want to count the clo'es?"

"Mercy, no; go on and have her do it," and she resumed her walk, thinking that really Marcelline was

very tiresome at times. And now the long, wailing note of a conch shell reached her, and from around the bend in front of Miss Victorine's house, a lugger glided into view. It stopped at the bridge, and a figure standing at the prow, waited with statuesque patience to blow another signal if the bridge did not open. He was bare-headed and the wind tossed his dark hair and the ends of the red neckerchief knotted about his throat. Catherine looked at him with pleasure, he was so graceful and picturesque. Uncle Peter, the bridge tender, hobbled slowly out of his cabin on the bayou side, and parleyed with him. She did not know that Uncle Peter was refusing to open the bridge unless the boatman first sold him some oysters for the Big House. This was a frequent way of getting supplies on the bayou, and Marcelline had commissioned him to waylay the passing boats. At first the boatman was obdurate, preferring to carry his whole cargo to Bergerac. Finally, however, the bridge opened, the lugger glided through, turning its vast expanse of crimson sail toward the morning sun, and presently Uncle Peter came trundling a wheelbarrow on which lay a mass of dark, dripping shells secured by his innocent piracy. In a few moments, Catherine heard voices in murmured conversation, emanating from the kitchen, a square, detached building at some distance from the main house.

When Uncle Peter left, Marcelline returned to the gallery. "Does you 'member 'bout Malabar, Miss Catrine?" she asked.

"Yes!" said Catherine with sudden interest.

"Unc' Timothy Brim from Malabar war on that boat, and he say they's havin' plenty trouble down yonder. The liggeroo have ben a-prowlin' roun' there, a-cryin' in the swamp, an' a-peepin' into the winders an' scarin' the young Madam into high-sterricks. Miss Hortense don't believe in no liggeroo, an' the young Madam rare an' charge an' say hit are all Miss Hortense fault the liggeroo are there. An' Unc' Timothy are a-goin' up to Bergerac fer the young doctor. I reckon somebody done conjur the young Madam—'case she sure are mean, an' neither she ain't quality—but, howsome-dever, her ole man, Mr. Ovide, have done sont fer the doctor, an' crave fer Miss Victorine to come down an' lend a hand. But Miss Victorine have went over to Bayou Blanc—an' shore's you is born, that liggeroo ain't a-hantin' Malabar fer nothin'. Hit are a warnin', sure."

"Marcelline," Catherine exclaimed, her face flushing with eagerness, "I'd like to go and help. Would they think it an intrusion?"

Marcelline hesitated. Of what use could so helpless a person be, she wondered. And yet her eagerness was so manifest the old woman was reluctant to put her doubts into words.

"I want to go," Catherine cried, clasping her hands—those slender, useless hands.

"Jacques Lirette are a-comin' back to-day," Marcelline mused, "but," with sudden decision, "you

cain't go in his boat. He are mighty bold an' sassy, and you cain't mix up with no sech trash. But neither the young Madam ain't quality. She come from the oyscher reefs, an' Mr. Ovide done wrong to marry her, an' 'tain't fitten fer you to mix up with her nor nobody like her, neither." Like all self-respecting plantation negroes, Marcelline was keenly alive to the difference between "quality" and "trash" and resented the crossing from one caste to another.

"Who is Miss Hortense?" Catherine demanded eagerly, ignoring Marcelline's last words.

"She are Mr. Ovide's sister; you-all far-away parent."

"Oh, I want to go," Catherine repeated. "I will go!" she asserted after another pause.

"I could drive you down," Marcelline began. "They ain't plowin', an' Gladys an' Damon could haul you — but — Miss Hortense are —" She paused as if uncertain how to continue her objections.

"I don't care if she is," Catherine interrupted in her headstrong way. "If Damon and Pythias — or whatever the mules' names may be — if they're plowing, they can stop. That's all. I'm going." She could scarcely have explained why she longed so ardently to take this trip, nor what she anticipated in the visit. It was "something to do" and that was reason enough.

Fergus was somewhat taken aback when he learned at dinner that a trip to Malabar was to be made that very day; that Marcelline was to act as driver, and Ananias would take her place and cook supper.

"Shall you be back before dark?" he asked anxiously after helping Catherine into the rickety vehicle.

"Hit'll be the aidge er the evenin' er later," Marcelline, who was starting with manifest reluctance, assured him; but Catherine, impatient to be off, merely waved good-by.

The road, stretching ahead, followed the windings of the bayou. A blue kingfisher flying before them, skimming swiftly along close to the surface of the water, was reflected in its brown bosom. The day was cold in spite of the fitful sunlight, and as the wind swept up the bayou, Catherine buttoned her coat more tightly, congratulating herself that it had not disappeared with her other possessions.

Presently they came in sight of an unpainted house with toppling mud chimney. It was surrounded by leafless China trees, their shriveled balls dropping on the bare earth where a few lean fowls wandered and scratched, picking at the broken crockery in the fence corners. On the dilapidated gate leaned a young woman with a baby in her arms. The woman was barefoot, bareheaded, unkempt, unwashed. Two or three emaciated hounds sniffed and yelped at the vehicle. Marcelline bowed in passing. The woman stared at Catherine whose tailored suit was more amazing to her than wampum and war paint would have been. Catherine, for her part, looked at the woman with an expression of distaste and aloofness mingled with the most unbounded surprise, for never

in her sheltered life had she beheld such an object as her haughty gaze now rested upon.

"That are Madam Bonvillain; Dr. Bonvillain's ole lady," Marcelline explained when they had passed.

"I didn't know there was a doctor nearer than Bergerac," said Catherine. "Evidently he has no practice."

"Yas'm, he are got plenty practice," Marcelline corrected.

"I suppose they pay him next to nothing then," Catherine hazarded. "Doctors in the country can't make much."

"Yas'm they does," Marcelline corrected again. "They suttinly comes high. They charges a dollar a mile — an' it ain't never lessen a mile to nowhar."

"I wonder where he studied," Catherine said indifferently — not that she cared, but merely speculating idly as one does over unfamiliar objects.

"Him?" Marcelline exclaimed, "he ain't never studied. He's a natural doctor. He ain't never needed to study like that young doctor up to Bergerac. Dr. Bonvillain don't know how to read ner write; ner he don't need to. He has jes' got natural knowledge. He know all about sickness. He don't believe in givin' all them messes what other doctors gives. He say tha's all foolishness. He kin doctor you 'thout so much as lookin' at you. He jes' send word: 'Fust off, you take calomel — a plenty of it. Then you take castor oil, then you take quinine!' Drunk or sober, them's all he give. Them three drugs."

And now they came in sight of a row of cabins thatched with palmetto leaves. There were nets drying on the fences; and on the bayou side, frames under which fires were burning. Around the frames, through the thick smoke that rose from the smouldering flames, the forms of half naked children could be dimly discerned stirring masses of coral-colored shrimp spread out to dry. As the vehicle approached, the children stopped their work and gazed at Catherine with the timidity of untamed creatures. Beside one of the cabins was a row of bee hives.

"These people seem thrifty," Catherine observed. "I see they keep bees."

"Yas'm," Marcelline replied in a disparaging tone. "That are ole man Lirette's place; but he don't make much fum his bees. They loses so much time."

"How so?" Catherine asked. "On account of the weather?"

"No, Ma'am; on account of they religion."

"I don't understand," Catherine exclaimed in bewilderment.

"Bees doesn't never wuk Sundays," Marcelline explained, "neither feast days, neither fast days; an' them's Catholic bees an' they has plenty holy days in they chu'ch. An' they won't wuk effen they owners is in mou'nin' an' fergits to put suthin' black on ter the hives, so's they kin mou'n too."

Back of the row of cabins a vast sweep of meadow reached to the horizon. "Is that a rice field?" Catherine asked.

Marcelline turned and gave her mistress a searching look, then having apparently satisfied herself that the question was asked in good faith, she replied, "That ain't nothin', Miss Catrine, ceppin a floatin' prairie. Nothin' won't never grow there an' it ain't no use on God's earth."

"There surely are things growing there," Catherine argued. "I see them."

"Yas'm, they's things growin'," Marcelline agreed, "but in underneath, it ain't nothin' but water with trash what have floated on ter it an' weeds what has sprouted an' grewd. It air the deceivin'est thing in the world. Effen you was to try to step on ter it, you'd sink right down over your haid in water. Sometimes I wonders," she said musingly, "why it were ever made, case they says everything have some use."

"I should think they'd drain it," said Catherine, and again Marcelline turned a questioning look upon her.

"They's miles an' miles of floatin' prairie in this parish," she explained. "I don't reckon it kin be drained, no more'n Barataria Bay. Effen it could be, I reckon Mr. Tobias would sure have buyed it cheap an' drained it too long ago to talk about. But it have ben there sence world without end, an' I reckon hit'll stay till Jedgegment Day."

The carriage wheels now ran along the edge of the bayou, crushing the wild morning glory vines, the cypress and May-pop, where occasionally a belated blossom showed a gleam of carmine or azure. On the opposite side of the bayou, in a place where the bank

was a jungle of thorn bushes and creepers, Catherine dimly discerned an unpainted cross, overgrown with lichens and sagging to one side as if about to fall.

"What's that?" she asked.

"They allows that are Noré Pinel grave," Marcel-line replied.

"Noré Pinel!" Catherine exclaimed. "It's strange he should be buried in this remote place — here on the bayou side."

"No, Ma'am, 'tain't strange," Marcelline corrected her, "'case he war a fisherman."

"I thought he was a planter."

"Yas'm, he war a planter, an' he war a fisherman. He could turn his hand to anything. Times he plant, an' times he hunt, an' times he fish; but mos'ly, he fish. He could *fish*!" Marcelline drawled impressively. "He cotch whales an' sharks an' mermaze. I ain't never see them kin's er fish, but they tells me he cotch 'em jes' ez easy ez nothin'."

"I have seen whales and sharks," said Catherine, "but never mermaids."

"They tells me they is sca'ce," Marcelline observed, "but he cotch 'em."

The road grew lonelier and more desolate; the bayou widened and there was no sign of human life. No sound except the whispering of the wind in the tall, dried grasses on the bank, or the occasional scream of a gull or an osprey flying overhead. Skirting the edge of the floating prairie, they came to higher ground where they were able to move more rapidly. Here

they passed a lugger beating its slow way against the wind to the Gulf for a night's fishing. Leaning over the edge, watching her, was the same figure she had seen that morning parleying with Uncle Peter. The stinging wind that tossed his dark hair, painted his cheeks a vivid carmine. As their eyes met, he smiled and it was like a flash of sunlight. Seated at the stern of the boat was an old man smoking a pipe and stolidly staring at her.

"Who are they?" Catherine asked.

"Ole man Lirette an' his son, M'sieur Jacques."

"Oh, the ones that own the bees?"

"Yas'm."

"They are fishermen?" Catherine asserted rather than asked.

"The ole man are. M'sieur Jacques ain't nothin'. He kin dance, an' he kin sing, an' all them fool gals fum Bergerac to the Gulf is crezzy about him — but he don't wuk, ceppin when the notion take him. That are Madam Lirette fault. She spile him. Every time he ax fer the moon she cut it right down an' hand it to him. His sisters kin wuk 'case they ain't purty; but him! He don't do a blessed thing lessen he feel like it."

Catherine turned and looked at him. He had risen and was standing at the prow watching her; as graceful, as boyishly beautiful as a young Greek god. And as their eyes met, he smiled again — a smile so alluring that, unconsciously, she smiled back.

VII

THE drive proved longer than expected and night was falling when, emerging from a strip of thick woods, they drew up at a gate flanked by tall posts on which moss-grown urns showed dimly in the light of the carriage lamps.

"Malabar," Marcelline announced, descending ponderously from the vehicle to open the gate.

At the sound of their rattling wheels as they drove up the long, winding approach through the trees, a slender figure came out on to the gallery carrying a lamp. Catherine's heart gave a bound. This was what she had hoped for — this woman with the pure, refined face illumined in the surrounding darkness like that of a saint in a shrine. Here was companionship.

Catherine spoke eagerly as she ascended the steps. "I am Catherine Maine," she said. "I heard that Mrs. Trosclair was ill and I came, hoping I might help."

The lady greeted her with grave courtesy, leading her into a great, cheerless room where everything — the empty fireplace, the uncurtained windows, everything — spoke of poverty. The lady seated herself beside a table on which she had placed the lamp, and without a word, began knitting. There was absolute

silence except for the ticking of a clock somewhere at a distance; the very clock, Catherine imagined, that had measured the last hours of the "old Madam's" life.

"I heard that Mrs. Trosclair was ill," Catherine repeated after waiting in vain for the other to speak, "and that you had sent for the doctor."

The lady looked at her with inscrutable dark eyes; eyes so dark, so large, they gave her pale, delicate face an emaciated look. There was about her an aloofness as if the silence had penetrated her very soul.

"I think Mrs. Trosclair's trouble is more an affection of the nerves than of the body," she replied with apparent effort. "I am surprised Uncle Timothy should have intruded upon *you*."

"He wanted Miss Victorine," Catherine explained. "He didn't ask for me; but she had gone to Bayou Blanc. I wanted to come. I am lonely," she added, "and I believe we are related — are we not?"

The lady seemed not to hear, but continued knitting, her eyes resting upon some fathomless abyss of space. Apparently she had become oblivious of her surroundings, and Catherine, wounded in her tenderest point — her pride — longed to escape! Oh, why had she come! Why had she not obeyed Marcelline's hinted suggestion that it would be best not to know these unfriendly Trosclairs? Had the shame and ridicule with which Fergus had been assailed penetrated even here? Were they still to be shunned and scorned? Had they not yet escaped the threatened prison shadow? She

wished the lady would realize how lonely she was, how innocent of wrongdoing, how starved for companionship.

A man appeared at the half open door and now Catherine became conscious of a woman's voice querulously moaning. "Hortense," he said, "don't you think the doctor will be here soon?" His thin lips were compressed as if to prevent their trembling.

"He should be here now," the lady replied. "Something must have detained him." Then to Catherine, "Miss Maine, this is my brother, Ovide Trosclair."

He barely acknowledged the introduction and repeated, "He'll surely be here soon. Don't you think so?"

"I hope so," the lady replied, and added, "Miss Maine came to help."

"She's very kind," he said in an absent, perfunctory tone, evidently listening for a sound outside. Then he broke off fretfully, "I wish he'd come! I think she's getting worse."

"I think it can't be much longer now," his sister reassured him, and he left the room without glancing at Catherine.

"Am I of so little importance?" she thought with a confused nightmare feeling. Manifestly, they neither needed nor wished her presence — yet she felt desperately that she must, she would conquer the indifference of this kinswoman — her own blood — and yet as remote as if oceans separated them. And as she looked at her, yearning with her whole heart for her friend-

ship, searching in her mind for some word that might prove a bond between them, a face looked in from the blackness outside. A white face with hollow eyes in which the lamp-light glittered; a face whose pallor was intensified by a dark spot on one temple. At her startled gasp, Hortense Trosclair became suddenly conscious of her presence, and rose, gazing at her with an eager, questioning look.

"What did you see?" she asked in a hushed tone.

"A face," Catherine said tremulously; "a face —" she could say no more, but motioned with a shaking hand toward the glass door. Without a word, Hortense walked out into the darkness. Quivering in every limb, afraid to go, yet afraid to remain alone in the vast, shadowy room, Catherine followed and stood beside her. There was not a sound to break the stillness. Even the night wind seemed to hold its breath.

"Might you not have been mistaken?" the lady whispered.

"No," Catherine breathed, peering into the darkness about them. "I saw it plainly."

"Could it not have been an optical illusion?"

"No," Catherine repeated almost inaudibly, "I saw it plainly. There was a stain of blood on one temple. Fresh blood —"

The lady pressed her hands together. They stood listening, and now, close beside them a voice broke the stillness with weird, mournful tremolo. Convulsively, Catherine caught Hortense's hands.

"How foolish we are," the lady said, gently disen-

gaging herself. "Did you never hear an owl before?"

"Never," Catherine replied, shuddering.

"You are excusable," Hortense observed in her tone of aloofness and abstraction. Then, after a momentary silence, she repeated, "You are excusable, for you are young and unaccustomed to the country, but I, who am old enough to be your mother and who have lived for years in this solitude, ought not to be so easily startled. You must have seen it fly past the door. At night one easily mistakes shadows for reality."

"But sometimes," Catherine began, then stopped, not wishing to be too insistent. After a moment, she added, "My mother's family, the Fessendens, have Irish blood, and they say the Celtic strain always brings superstition with it."

"'Fessenden,'" the lady repeated in a changed tone. "It is an unusual name. I never knew but one person named Fessenden."

"You know a Fessenden?" Catherine asked eagerly, feeling that, at last, she had found a link between them. "What is the given name? I'm always interested in every one of that name."

"Ralph was the given name," said the lady, hesitating as if she spoke with difficulty.

"Ralph Fessenden!" Catherine ejaculated. "Why, he was my mother's cousin! It must be he. Where did you meet him?"

"In London — many years ago. Where is he now?"

"I don't know," said Catherine. "I, too, saw him last in London, when I was quite a little girl. I remember I admired him extravagantly and I have heard since that he was very brilliant. How interesting that you knew him!"

"And you don't know what became of him?"

"In a way, yes. There was some sort of story — I don't remember exactly what —" She paused, and then went on, anxious to hold the interest of this woman who had fascinated her. She could not have explained the charm that Hortense Trosclair possessed for her, but she longed to take her in her arms, to beg for her love. She had found her — must she lose her? Could she not claim and hold her by the strong right of kindred blood?

"And you don't know what became of him," Hortense Trosclair repeated as if to herself.

"I think he disappeared from the world long ago. He was in Switzerland and it was believed that he was lost in a crevasse in one of the glaciers. No, I think he was lost at sea — or something — I don't remember the details, but I know he disappeared. Everyone was very much shocked, I remember, and wouldn't speak of it before me — but I heard enough to know that he was dead."

The lady drew a faint, shuddering sigh. From a distance came the silvery, minor note of the owl, and now Catherine felt, rather than heard, far off, a rhythmic vibration which was scarcely a sound. She stood in silence beside Hortense Trosclair, who had already

forgotten her. Nearer came the hoof beats and nearer, now mingled with the rattle of wheels, and finally there emerged from the darkness the young, rosy-faced doctor with old Uncle Timothy Brim beside him.

Catherine stood irresolute. Hortense Trosclair had bidden her good-by with a clasp of the hand as light as the touch of a snowflake, and with a perfunctory word of thanks had dismissed her forever and ever. They had no need of her. She groped her way down the steps, her eyes smarting with unshed tears.

Huddled in one corner of the vehicle, she rode silently through the interminable darkness. Marcel-line, now dozing, now waking with a start, muttered imprecations upon the proverbial inhospitality of the Trosclairs. The carriage lamps cast fantastic shadows in long perspective across the bare fields where a few withered husks of cane whispered in the cold night wind. The fishermen's settlement was dimly outlined in the wavering lights; then, after another long interval, the decrepit cabin of Dr. Bonvillain. A hound, hearing the sound of wheels, raised his voice mournfully.

The eastern sky showed a faint tinge of gray when Catherine heard the plantation bell calling the laborers to their day's toil. Then, presently, across the bayou, she saw the dim light of the quarters, and, a moment later, the great, open gate of Espérance.

VIII

AFTER the first questions in regard to Catherine's visit to Malabar — questions which she answered briefly and with evident reluctance — nothing more was said on the subject, and having lost her one hope of outside companionship, she fell into a fathomless loneliness. "Nothing to do! No way of passing the time!" and Fergus, rightly interpreting her need, suggested one occupation after another.

"You always liked flowers," he said; "supposing you see what Uncle Peter can do with your garden. They tell me he's a good gardener."

The morning was clear and bracing, and Catherine, for once accepting a suggestion, went out and strolled in her garden. She walked along, watching for snakes and caterpillars (her high, French heels leaving a trail of little round holes in the soft earth), and presently she heard the sound of a conch shell. Going to the fence, she looked over and saw several luggers, freshly painted in brilliant blues and greens and covered with flags and streamers, gliding through the open bridge where Uncle Peter stood waving with unusual friendliness.

They floated up to the little landing opposite the gate of *Espérance* and the owners, laughing and chattering, disappeared into the church.

Marcelline came into the garden bringing a wrap which Catherine slipped on without glancing at it. They stood for a time watching the scene on the opposite bank. And now carts filled with people came up the road; then a stream of pedestrians. Of these, nearly all, men, women and children, were carrying their shoes in their hands, and, crossing the bridge, sat down on the grassy roadside to put them on.

Marcelline respectfully standing a little back of her mistress, announced regretfully, "'Tain't no funeral. They ain't no undertaker's wagon."

"Why do they do that?" Catherine asked in astonishment as they began putting on their shoes.

"'Case they wants to be fine in the chu'ch. Hit's a weddin'. I reckon hit's Ottinsia Lirette's. Unc' Timothy Brim tole us she war goin' to marry one er M'sieur Poisson's boys."

"But why did they take off their shoes?" Catherine asked.

"They never tooken 'em off; they didn't put 'em on, 'case it hurts too bad to walk in good shoes when you is goin' so further."

Another boat appeared, more gaily painted and decorated (if possible) than the others, and someone was playing a guitar and singing in a clear, thrilling tenor. "That are Jacques Lirette," said Marcelline. "Hit mout be his weddin'."

A pang shot through Catherine, unreasonable and impossible to explain. Jacques Lirette was not of her

world; she could never know him — she did not really wish to know him — and yet, for no reason, she felt one degree lonelier. She fell to imagining what might have happened under other circumstances. If she had lived in other days, and had been a queen, she would have had that beautiful boy with the soul-stirring voice as her page. She thought of Mary Stuart and Rizzio. She would have had this boy educated and he might have become her knight — no, he should have been her troubadour. Ronald might have been her knight. Ronald, swift of foot, with unerring eye and muscles of steel.

Presently the people came pouring out of the church; the bride in her white dress and veil; the bridegroom, gawky and miserable in the unaccustomed splendor of a store suit and white collar; the crowd of friends in all they could muster of finery, and, conspicuous among them for grace and beauty, the bride's brother, Jacques. The luggers were loosed and starting down stream, when, standing at the prow of his boat, he looked up at Catherine and with a graceful, sweeping motion, took off his hat and smiled at her. Smilingly, she returned his salutation.

"He are mighty bold and sassy, that Jacques Lirette!" Marcelline grumbled.

Ronald's voice, close beside her, asked: "Was that impudent Jacques Lirette bowing to you?"

"I suppose so," Catherine replied.

"Where did you ever meet him?"

"I never met him," she acknowledged, feeling unaccountably guilty. "I thought every one bowed to every one in the country."

"They do when they meet on the high road, but he knows better than to bow that way across the bayou. It was bold and familiar of him."

She felt an inclination to laugh at such hair-splitting. If Jacques Lirette could bow to her on the high road, why must he not bow on the bayou? It seemed too foolish; but she merely said, "I thought you were at the sugar house."

"I was, but had to come over for some papers." They walked together toward the gate. Now and then he steadied her as she stepped cautiously, fearing to twist her ankle. "You ought to have some sensible shoes and clothes," he said. "Such things aren't appropriate for the country."

She glanced down at the opera cloak in which she was enveloped. "I do look like a Mardi Gras," she acknowledged. It seemed to her he might have said something pleasant. He might have told her she looked pretty, anyway, in spite of her fantastic costume. In other days he would have done so, but now he walked along in silence. And yet she felt a secret amusement at his perverse mood, as she considered it. In spite of his flaunting independence, his ostentatious pulling away from her influence, he was not indifferent to her. He was jealous of that Cajan boy! There might be some amusement, after all, she reflected, even at this last end of the world.

"Ronald," she said as they walked toward the gate, "I was building castles in the air. I was thinking, if I had lived in other days and had been a queen, I'd have chosen you to be my knight."

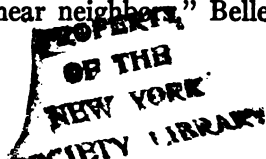
"Me!" he ejaculated. "You would have chosen me?" His face flushed, and she felt a twinge of conscience at having told him a half-truth.

"Yes," she said, "you were born to be a knight." Her velvety eyes looked marvelously soft and gentle as she smiled up at him, and moved by an overmastering impulse, he stooped and kissed her. Instantly, he regretted the act, realizing that this was the very mood he must avoid and resolving it should be the last time he forgot his determination.

"Excuse the intrusion," called a laughing voice, and Belle Snively leaned out of the great red car from Gold Mine which, unperceived, had glided up to the gate.

"Belle Snively!" Catherine ejaculated and the two were clasped in each others' arms. For the moment, it seemed to Catherine that they had loved each other. Then, as Belle looked curiously at her, and Catherine became conscious of her scrutiny, she remembered she had never liked Belle very well; that she had chosen her to be one of her Maids out of caprice and to tease Angelina Horne who coveted the honor; and that her prying, intrusive assistance had made those last days in the city doubly hard.

"I want you both to meet my friends, Mrs. and Miss Blaise; your near neighbors," Belle ran on, and



her companions murmured, "Pleased to meet you," while they examined Catherine from head to foot. "I'm here just for the week end," Belle explained, "or I'd come to see you. But we're simply rushed to death. We're on our way to Bergerac now. Isn't this just the most adorable country? We're going to lunch at the cunningest, little, old hotel with Pierre Poisson — he's just as odd and original as he can be. Well, bye-bye, Catherine, we'll come to see you the next time I'm out here. Oh," with a restraining motion to the chauffeur as the car gave a premonitory jerk, "Modesta had a letter from Adolphus Banks the other day. He's having a wonderful time in Washington, but he hasn't forgotten his New Orleans friends. He may come down for a vacation and if he does, he's coming out here — didn't he say so, Modesta?"

"He asked if he could," she replied, the while her eyes were furtively taking account of Ronald's fine physique, his haughtily poised head, and his general air of distinction.

"He asked after you, Catherine," Belle added, but with the manner of one who is keeping something back. "He wanted to know how you were getting along, and all that, you know. Well, bye-bye."

As the car started, Miss Blaise leaned out and said, "I'm coming to see you very soon, Miss Maine. I won't wait for Belle."

Catherine and Ronald stood in the open gate looking after them. They were apparently laughing, and Belle, looking back, waved her hand.

"She's pretty," Ronald observed. "You may find her companionable."

"That Blaise girl? Oh, Ronald!" with a deprecating little laugh.

"She's certainly pretty," he repeated.

"Pretty?" she mocked, secretly annoyed. Within her own soul, she could not deny that the girl was pretty; perhaps even unusually so. But she who had never abdicated and had never brooked a rival, was now playing the part she had assigned to Ronald. She was jealous. "Since when have you admired paint so much?" she inquired.

"Since I saw it so skillfully used by Miss Blaise; if, as you seem to imply, she was painted."

"If," Catherine repeated, "didn't you see it?"

"I saw she was quite fresh and rosy, and altogether a charmingly innocent-looking young girl."

"Doubtless, a reigning belle in the city of Bergerac," Catherine agreed.

"Doubtless. You two will be rivals —"

"I think not," she retorted. "I hardly think that an overseer's daughter and I are very likely to be rivals."

"Her father is the owner of Gold Mine — not the overseer," Ronald corrected. "You both have youth and beauty —"

But Catherine was not to be so easily placated. "You forget," she reminded him, "that her grandfather was overseer at Espérance and stole half of the plantation — or am I mistaken? Wasn't it her grandfather?"

"If the servants' gossip is correct," he replied, "it was her grandfather who beat your grandfather at a game of cards and won half of Espérance. But that is rather ancient history, isn't it? If you have no more recent grievance than that —" He stopped.

"I haven't," she observed with careful indifference, "and perhaps you are right. Perhaps I may learn to admire the overseer's daughter as much as you do —"

"Or perhaps as much as if her father were a Cajan fisherman?" he suggested. It was a chance shot, but it struck home.

"Yes," she said over her shoulder as she walked haughtily away, "if he is honest. I still prefer honest people to thieves."

IX

IF Ronald had shown any sign of penitence for his part of the quarrel, Catherine would have met him half way, for, in her intense loneliness and need of companionship, she preferred peace to war. But Ronald had been too deeply and too often wounded to find it easy to forgive. Furthermore, the very fact that he loved her with the devotion of a lifetime, made it impossible for him to overlook her facile vanity that was willing to accept homage from every chance comer. Haughty and exclusive in her social intercourse, she had the true siren instinct which tried to enslave others while holding herself absolutely free. Less easily aroused than she, he was slower to forgive, and the pride inherited from a long line of ancestors showed in his face and bearing. Inordinately proud herself, she felt something like fear of his nature which added to all its other sources the unyielding pride of poverty. Feeling that no one but Fergus cared for her now, she found solace in scorning and hating "the Blaise girl" whole-heartedly.

The atmosphere was in this turbid state when, one day, Miss Blaise, fair as a lily, and dressed in the most stylish of riding habits, rode up to the gate of Espérance, and Ronald, appearing from somewhere,

walked along the driveway with his hand on her horse's shoulder. Catherine saw the flash of his white teeth as he looked smilingly up at the girl's face and without considering the unwisdom of the act, flew upstairs and hid. From where she was crouching in the semi-darkness, she heard their voices — Miss Blaise's, thin, nasal, the proverbial "American voice"; Ronald's, mellow and cultured.

"And he can like a girl with a voice like that!" Catherine thought scornfully.

Presently there was an opening and shutting of doors as Marcelline made her slow way from room to room. Toilsomely, she climbed the stairs, and Catherine felt the terror that assails little children when they are playing hide and seek.

"She sha'n't find me," she thought, and crouched lower behind the boxes that half filled the closet.

The door opened and Marcelline's face peered in, screwed up to enable her to penetrate the dark recesses; finally she turned away and Catherine heaved a sigh of relief. After a time, she knew by the sounds that the two were on their way to the gate; so, stealing from her hiding place she ran softly down stairs where, to her discomfiture, she found Marcelline waiting in the hall.

"She say she mighty sorry you wa'n't to home," the old woman reported, then, glancing at the top of her mistress's head, she added, "I ben layin' off to make Pidgeon cobweb that upstairs dark closet too long to talk about."

Involuntarily, Catherine raised her hand to the top of her head (which was draped with a cobweb mantilla) and Marcelline, apparently ignoring the gesture, turned and walked away with the erect and stately carriage of a peasant who, all her life, has borne burdens on her head. She perceived her mistress's dislike of Modesta Blaise and felt a sympathy she dared not express.

The bleak, wintry weather continued, and Catherine, insufficiently clad, suffered from a succession of colds. Her lack of executive ability was so manifest that only Fergus could be blind to it; but, while Ronald saw and deplored it, he often longed to take her in his arms and shield her from her own follies. But this mood he was careful never to betray.

"She should provide herself with proper clothing," he said to Fergus one day after she had sneezed miserably all through dinner.

"She can't get 'proper clothing'," Fergus reminded him.

"Then she should marry her successful and disinterested suitor, Adolphus Banks."

"Do you wish her to do so?" Fergus asked.

"Yes," Ronald answered after a brief hesitation, "I wish she would." And he did not explain that, until she was actually married he could never fully rid himself of a feeling of suspense in regard to her.

"Do you think he would make her a good husband?"

"No."

"Then why do you wish her to marry him?"

They looked a moment at each other and then Ronald said, "I confess, it is a selfish reason."

"I see," said Fergus and resumed his writing (they were in their dingy little office at the sugar house); presently he paused and said, "I believe you are crippling your future by remaining here."

"For the present," Ronald replied, "I have no future except with you. I wish no other."

"And my duty keeps me here," Fergus observed. "It is a debt of honor I owe to my father to take care of Catherine." He said no more, but as he spoke, it occurred to Ronald that he too owed a debt of honor and that he was not discharging it by remaining in his present attitude of mind. He must regain the moral balance which he had temporarily lost.

While this conversation was taking place, Catherine was writing a letter to Adolphus Banks. She had begun a dozen and torn them up. What should she say? She could not acknowledge that she had accepted him merely to annoy Ronald, neither (it seemed to her) could she confess that, stung by his silence, she had drifted, because, for her, he no longer existed. Seated in a corner of the high-backed wooden settle close to the fire, yet shivering with cold, she readjusted her writing materials and thoughtfully bit the end of her penholder.

Half hidden behind the load of wood he held clasped in both arms, Pidgeon entered. With a jerk of the head, he tossed his cap on to the floor and, tip-toeing from the dining-room door, dropped the wood with a

thunderous noise into the box beside the fireplace; then, straightening himself, brushed the dust from his sleeves and said, "Will I chunk the fire and put on a log, Miss Catrine?"

She regarded his short, square figure which seemed to grow bunchier as the days went by, and noticed how frozen his hands looked. A few weeks ago, before she herself had known what it was to feel pinched with cold, she would not have noticed his suffering. "Yes, Pidgeon," she said, "you may as well. It's very cold, isn't it? Are you cold?"

"Yas'm, Miss Catrine," he replied, standing at attention with the poker in his hand, "I sure is."

"Are you warmly enough dressed?"

"No, Ma'am, I isn't; but I has on everything they is. I has on two coats an' three pairs of pants. I has on mines, an' Hezekiah's an' Theophiles', an' they is stayin' in bed whiles I wuks."

"Oh," she said gently, "That's hard."

"Yas'm," he agreed cheerfully, "but my maw say we cain't expec' to walk on flower beds of ease; an' neither we cain't, Miss Catrine."

"Were you christened, Pidgeon?" she asked. "Is it your real name?"

"No, Ma'am," he replied emphatically, standing with chest and stomach rounded out like the breast of a pouter pidgeon, "my for true name are Hilérion Aurestille Pichoff, but they calls me Pidgeon for short."

"Oh," said Catherine and resumed her writing.

He "chunked" the fire, then, rising to his feet,

announced as if he had just learned the fact, "Miss Catrine, M'sieur Jacques Lirette have brang you some bird, an' he say, mout he see you a minute."

She was saved the necessity of answering, for Jacques now spoke from the dining room door. "Mees Catrine," he said, coming into the hall, "Mr. Fergus tole me you would like some bird. I shot some, soon this mornin' for you, an' here they is." He held up a bunch of birds for her to see, then, with an authoritative gesture, motioned Pidgeon to carry them away.

"You are very kind," she said. "It must have been cold so early in the morning."

"Cold, yes;" he replied, "but beautiful. There were such a frost, Mees Catrine, my pirogue cut through the hice. An' deep in the swamp, there were some pink flower, all in hice, like glass. I wished I could 'ave bring them to you."

She looked up at the beautiful boy standing there in the firelight, his face radiant at the thought of the ice-encased flowers. Seen from a distance, he had seemed to her the most graceful creature she had ever seen, but, at the same time, she suspected that he would not bear nearer inspection. Now, at close range, she was almost disconcerted by his lustrous eyes, the rich, soft coloring of hair and skin, the purity and delicacy of feature. Where did he get such beauty, she wondered. And looking up at him, and listening to his soft, foreign voice, she endowed him with all the poetry and tragedy of his race: the Acadians — Evangeline's people. These thoughts flashed through her mind,

and, meanwhile, he stood, with the unembarrassed ease and grace of the Creole, waiting to be dismissed or retained at her pleasure. She chose the latter.

"They were in a case of ice, did you say?"

"Yes," he replied, "an' they shined like — like —" (He searched his mind for a comparison.) "like the clouds when the sun are risin'."

"What kind of flowers were they?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered musingly. "I never seen none like them before."

(Oh, Catherine, Catherine, what should you have thought of those double negatives if uttered by Modesta Blaise? Coming from him, they seemed only quaint and foreign.) "I'd love to see them," she exclaimed impulsively.

After an imperceptible hesitation, in which his eyes searched her face, he went on, "They was growin' to the yuther aidge of the swamp, an' I push my pirogue through a long, narrer stream, like a bayou, in the hiddenes' heart of the swamp, where the trees bend over an' the green light shine soft an' dim like they was a mist, an' right there, when I wan't lookin' fer flowers, there was the blossoms, shinin' through the hice." His face wore an inspired expression as he recalled the scene, and watching him, she unconsciously reflected his look. "An' there was birds' nesses," he went on.

"What kind of birds?" she asked, moving a little so as to look at him more at her ease. The truth was; her cold had given her a stiff neck, but the boy, not

knowing this, and taking her change of position as a tacit invitation, seated himself beside her. She felt an instant's constraint at the situation — that he, the fisherman's boy, should be sitting beside her, Catherine Maine,— then, yielding to his charm, she gave herself up to the pleasure of having someone to talk to. Someone who was neither admonishing nor scolding her, who was young and attractive. Fergus was away all day and absorbed in his writing in the evening; Ronald was always constrained with her; Miss Victorine, Marcelline,— these were the dramatis personæ of her present life. Why should she not talk with this chance comer? It was a moment's diversion. A law to herself, she dismissed the fear of possible ill consequences and gave herself up to the pleasure of the moment.

“I reckon you'd love them swamps,” he said, leaning back in the firelight as gracefully carefree as the immortal gods. “The pirogue move along without makin' no noise an' you hears the birds a-callin'. Everything's pretty what God have made; even the snakes. 'Tain't their fault they is snakes; they cain't help it; an' they is pretty too if you keeps from hatin' them. I wonder why people hates anything what lives,” he mused, looking at the fire. “But I reckon everybody loves flowers — an' some folks seems just like flowers. You cain't help lovin' them. It ain't no use tryin'.” He raised his eyes from the fire and regarded her, with a soft, caressing look. “And birds,” he said, “is like that. You loves them, an' yet

you kills them — same as you picks a flower an' lets it wither."

"You ought not to kill them if you feel that way," she commented. "It's too painful."

"It didn't pain me none," he replied. "I killed them same's I'd pick them flower fer you. It seem like they belong to you an' they had a right to die, ef you want them."

She looked dreamily into the fire. Lulled by the music of his voice, she scarcely followed his words until she was roused by a change of tone. With a rippling laugh, as merry as a child's he said, "An' you doesn't even know how to cook them! When is you goin' to learn? Women has to work same's men, out in the kentry. I'm skeered your ole man'll beat you good an' plenty, when you gits married."

"What?" she ejaculated, scarcely crediting her hearing.

"Yes," he continued meditatively, "when girls is triflin', it goes hard when they gits married. 'Tain't good to be too lazy. But," returning to his soft, alluring tone, "I reckon some folks ain't made to work no more than a mockin'-bird are made to haul a plow." He smiled at her with that brilliant, lovable look. He had meant no harm. His beauty disarmed her.

The door opened and Ronald came in bringing a gust of cold air and a dash of rain from out of doors. As he came up the walk, his head bent to shield himself from the storm, he was thinking of what he would say to Catherine — what he had come home early to

say. He would forgive the past — forget it as far as was consistent with safety. There should be peace and not quarreling in the home. He would forgive the public affront she had put upon him by accepting Adolphus Banks. He would even believe that she had done it thoughtlessly without fully understanding the circumstances — poor, headstrong child that she was. He knew that she was keenly disappointed at his refusal to stay and see her as queen. And she had never been able to bear disappointment, or pain of any kind. And he would accept the position of friend — never again of lover — since that was all she could give him.

Then he opened the door, and a wave of indignation swept over him as he saw her sitting there in the firelight with the Cajan boy beside her. So this was what she was doing while Fergus and he toiled in the frost and rain! Dawdling away her time with this fisherman's boy, whose beauty had attracted her notice. It was unbelievable! Now had come the supreme test. Either he must be strong enough to control himself or he must give up what he considered his duty, and abandon Fergus in his struggle for a livelihood.

With perfect deliberation, he hung up his hat and overcoat, and came forward to the fire.

Catherine searched his face for a trace of the anger which she expected, but there was no sign of it as he stretched out his hands to the blaze and said, "It's penetratingly cold. Did you come in your boat, Lirette?"

"No, Mr. Ronal'," the boy replied, rising and speaking deferentially. "I come on my pony."

Catherine also rose, and saying, "I have been much interested in what you told me of the swamps," withdrew to her room. Here she stood listening to their voices. What were they talking so long about, she wondered. She could not distinguish their words. Could it be that Ronald was actually indifferent to what she had done? She wished he had been angry.

She thought of their conversation when she told him that he should have been her knight. Her knight? No! Modesta Blaise's knight. And Jacques Lirette was to have been her troubadour. No! Her fool who had come and spoken cruel truths to her.

X

THAT evening Fergus remonstrated with Catherine. They were sitting together at a table drawn close to the hall fireplace. He was writing, she was playing solitaire. It was cold; that bitter, penetrating cold of a semi-tropical climate. Laying down her cards, she wrapped her hands in her chiffon scarf and watched Fergus. She wished she could absorb herself in writing; or that she were free to go around as Ronald did. Certainly if she were, she would not seek companionship among those deadly-dull Blaisses at Gold Mine. At the Settlement, perhaps; it might be quaint and interesting, just to see how such people lived. She wished she could go around and peep into windows and see what people were doing to pass the time; or disguise herself and prow! around like Haroun-al-Raschid. Or have a magic carpet on which she could sail away anywhere she liked. But she'd have to have a cap of darkness to make herself invisible, otherwise, people would see that queer, square thing flying overhead and shoot at it, or gather in crowds to watch her when she landed. That idea was so unpleasant that she decided she'd rather have a wishing ring than a magic carpet. Then she would make herself in-

visible, and wish she were — where should she wish to go first?

She had reached this point in her reflections, when Fergus looked up from his writing, disturbed by the rattling of the casement. Through the uncurtained window, he could see the garden bathed in brilliant moonlight. A "black frost" was spreading devastation and his wan face looked even more than usually anxious. "I hope it won't hurt the cane," he said, not knowing that, at this season, after the grinding and before the new crop had sprouted, the frost would do no harm.

The life of the sugar planter is a perpetual oscillation between hope and fear. If the sugar cane — the staple product of that part of Louisiana — succeeds, he is well paid for his eleven months of toil and anxiety; but, in addition to the farmer's inborn distrust of providence and certainty that the weather is on the point of doing the wrong thing, the sugar planter has the constant fear of political complications that will rob him of his legitimate profits.

Catherine looked across at him and her heart swelled within her. So refined, so gentle; plain but so lovable, she thought. So emphatically a city man and exiled to this remote country. For the thousandth time she wondered if there were no other way of retrieving their fortunes than by staying in this desolate place where all the forces of nature seemed hostile.

"Fergus," she said, "what is it you're writing?"

He looked at her with a deprecating expression in

his brown eyes. "I suppose I'm foolish," he said, "but I'm trying to rewrite some of my manuscript from memory."

"And what are those little pictures?" she asked, leaning forward to look at the page upside down. "That looks like a rose."

"Oh," he exclaimed with a smile, "do you recognize it? Then I am more successful than I feared."

"I thought your book was about coins. Is it botany?"

"Oh, no. Do you recognize this other picture?"

"A bird, isn't it?"

"No." He turned the manuscript around for her to see, "What does it look like?"

"Oh, I see. It's a fly. I didn't know you could draw so well."

"It's a honey-fly: a bee."

"Botany and zoology!" she exclaimed. "How interesting that is, Fergus. You're perfectly wonderful to be writing that."

"No, no, it isn't botany or zoology," he explained. "It's on numismatics, and the bee was the emblem of the coins of Ephesus, and the rose of those of Rhodes."

"How interesting!" she said, but with flagging enthusiasm. "Did you ever receive that coin of Mithridates you ordered?"

"Yes; the day after the failure." He turned the manuscript back and resumed his writing. Evidently, it was painful to him to think of the lost collection. Perhaps he regretted the sums spent in gathering it

together. It had been his pet hobby; even dearer to him than his rare woodcuts.

He took off his glasses, breathed on them and wiping them carefully, held them up to the light to see if they were clear, then put them on and smiled at her. "I thought they were misty," he said, "but I believe it's the poor light." After a pause, in which he glanced back at the page he had just finished, he said, "Cathie, Ronald told Jacques Lirette you were engaged."

Blushing furiously, she asked, "What right had he to do that?"

"The right of affection," he answered slowly.

"'Affection'!" she repeated scornfully. "Lots of affection he has for me!" and she laughed bitterly.

"Yes, he has 'lots of affection' for you," Fergus repeated, "and because he feared you were drifting into a dangerous situation, he interfered."

"Do you mean to tell me," she demanded, "that he didn't do that out of temper? He came prancing in out of the rain and marched up and told that boy I was engaged! Did you ever hear anything as crude as that?"

"It wasn't quite that way," Fergus replied. "He had occasion to ask the boy to attend to some matters for us at Bergerac and, in the course of the conversation, casually mentioned that you were engaged."

"Of all preposterous things," she murmured, leaning her elbows on the table and burying her face in her scarf. "In the course of a business conversation with a stranger he tells him I am engaged! I'd like

to know what business it was of Jacques Lirette's."

"Ronald feared he might make it his business. That he might misinterpret your — condescension " (he hesitated and searched for the word) " and become presumptuous."

"What crazy nonsense!" she ejaculated, emerging from behind the scarf. "Not yours, Fergus, but Ronald's. He might know I could manage my own affairs without any interference from him. He's cross because I don't want to know that horrid Blaise girl that he admires so much. Why, Fergus, she's just an ordinary overseer's daughter, with just a little prettiness (this she acknowledged grudgingly). We'd never have known of her existence, under ordinary circumstances, and here's Ronald behaving as if she were Mary Queen of Scots herself. She's a billion times commoner than Jacques Lirette. He doesn't pretend to be anything but a fisherman's boy; and she puts on the airs of a Rockefeller, with her stolen money. I told Ronald —"

"I know," Fergus gently interrupted, reaching across the table to clasp her ice-cold fingers, "and when once we get at cross purposes it's hard to become reconciled. We see everything from opposite angles. But you're misjudging Ronald. It grieves him to see you insufficiently clad and with shabby, inappropriate shoes."

"Oh, he's been discussing my wardrobe, has he?" she cried hotly. "It's true, I can't be as magnificent as that Blaise girl. She outshines the Queen of Sheba."

"We mustn't quarrel, Cathie dear," he remonstrated in his gentle tone, ignoring her fling at Modesta; "there isn't room in our home for anger and hatred, is there, little sister?"

"Oh, Fergus," she exclaimed, "you are so good and we are so bad. I will try for your sake to be friends with Ronald — not that he deserves it."

When she had gone to her room, she looked through her wardrobe. With the exception of the one tailored suit which she had worn from the city, there were no street dresses; nothing, in fact, but the discarded evening gowns, wraps, and so on, of the year before. Dismissing from her mind a fleeting anger against those who must have appropriated this year's wardrobe, she determined to consult Marcelline on the subject of a dressmaker; for, truth to tell, it hurt her keenly to be shabbily dressed. She had always been over-fastidious, and had doubtless prided herself on that fact.

The old woman was stirring something in a great iron pot as Catherine appeared at the kitchen door the following morning, a rose-colored chiffon hanging over one arm and trailing on the floor.

"Marcelline," she began, "I've grown so thin my clothes wrap twice around me."

"Yas'm," Marcelline politely agreed, "me an' Sis Rose was makin' mirations 'bout that, no longer ago'n yestiddy. You ain't nothin' but a little frame."

"Can I get this made over, out here, do you think? How do people get things in the country?"

"Miss Delicia are right handy."

"Miss Delicia! How does she know anything about styles — way out here?"

"Styles?" Marcelline rested her hands on her ponderous hips and gazed doubtfully at Catherine. "She'd oughter know," she said.

"And you think she could make this over?" Catherine repeated.

"God willin', she'll fix it all right," Marcelline replied. "An' as fur style, everything is style out here. You watch them ladies goin' into the chu'ch; no two is dress alike — but all is in style."

And so it came about that Catherine went to see Miss Delicia. As she laid her hand on the gate she discovered the priest's portly form on the gallery. He rose at once and came down the path to meet her, his round, jovial face wreathed in welcoming smiles.

"It is a pleasure to welcome you, Mees Catrine," he said, offering her a chair on the sheltered gallery. "I have talk' very often with Mr. Maine an' Mr. Ronal', an' I have promise' myself the pleasure to pay my respect very soon at Espérance. It is my seester you desire to see? O-h, *Delicia!* Mees Catrine desire to spik with you."

There was a sound of scurrying inside the house and, a moment later, a shrill voice answered from the extreme rear.

"I fear Miss Delicia is busy," said Catherine, recalling the note of exasperation in the voice.

"Ah, bah," he replied airily. "You figure that to yourself from her voice. She 'ave the himpatient

voice, my seester Delicia, but loud hollering don't mean nothing in this house."

"Then I will wait," said Catherine, seating herself. "What lovely ferns you have," lifting a delicate, lace-like leaf. "How exquisite it is. Of what variety is it?"

"Not mine," he disclaimed. "I ignore the house plant. They belong to my seester. For me, I prefer the vegetable to flower. An onion, for example is beautiful, and —"

A hot tongue licked her hand and with a violent start she turned, expecting to see a dog. A pig stood beside her gazing up into her face. She recoiled with a startled cry, and Père Ignace called, "Va-t-en, Tobias!" Then, in a tone of surprise, "You do not like the pigs?"

"I was never so near one before," she answered, watching the creature distrustfully.

"They are very intelligent," he assured her, "and very affectionate. Now I will mek him beg pardon for the liberty of embracing your hand. Ask pardon at Mees Catrine, Tobias," he admonished.

Tobias bent his front legs and knelt after a fashion. Père Ignace reached among the flower pots and found a chip of wood with which he gently scratched the pig's head and back. "Now, Tobias," he said, "sing for Mees Catrine."

The pig demurred.

"Sing, Tobias," Père Ignace commanded. "Do, re, mi, fa; — sing!"

The pig grunted.

"You are not in good voice? I will give you some corn bread if you sing."

Whether Tobias understood the promise or not, he suddenly lifted up his voice in a succession of the most amazing and ear-splitting squeals.

Père Ignace laughed until his bright, red-brown eyes were watery crescents, and Catherine laughed too, until she was wiping her eyes.

"You would think there was a *boucherie* here, hein?" he asked as the pig became suddenly quiet. Père Ignace had a small, droll mouth with regular, well-shaped teeth stained with tobacco. Somehow, those yellowish teeth added an extra touch of drollery to the face. "Now, once more, Tobias," he requested. "One more aria and then a scherzo to finish and you shall have your corn bread."

Tobias squealed until it made Catherine's head ring. When he stopped, Père Ignace went to the open door and called, "Send me some corn bread, Delicia."

There was a shrill reply from the rear, and Père Ignace expostulated, "Oh, Delicia! Jus' a little piece. I have promise'."

Another retort, and Père Ignace repeated, "Oh, Delicia! Please! For me, then. I ate little breakfas'; it is not a fast day. Send me a little piece."

A small, inky-black, barefoot girl appeared, carrying a plate on which lay one small piece of corn bread.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" Père Ignace ejaculated as he re-

ceived it, "there is not enough for you an' me. Tobias, I mus' deny myself."

"How does he happen to be named Tobias?" Catherine asked as Père Ignace once more seated himself. "I thought Ananias said all pigs were called Chuneys."

He shot a glance of infinite mischief at her as he answered, "Tobias is name' in honor of a neighbor. But it is a resemblance! Look him in his face. It is to marvel!"

There was a stir among the plants close by Catherine's left hand and turning she saw the face of a horse, reaching with long, flexible lips toward the ferns. Instantly, as she turned, the animal's face assumed an indescribable malevolence of expression; the ears were laid close to the neck, the lips were drawn back and the great, square teeth grinned hideously.

"Cauchemar!" Père Ignace shouted, and with a snort the creature whirled and dashed around the corner of the house. "Guard thyself, Delicia," Père Ignace called to the invisible person within doors. "Cauchemar have escape'. Call Gaston to catch her."

"It startled me at first," said Catherine, "but I don't suppose it would have hurt me."

"But yes," he replied, "with all her heart she would have hurt you. She will do her possible for mischief."

"She is vicious?"

"Her temper is of the worst. She have every vice and no virtue." He smiled jovially. "As you observe, she is as ugly as the seven deadly sins and her character resemble her appearance."

"Where did you buy her?"

"I did not buy her; no. I am not so poor a trader." His sides shook with laughter. "M'sieur Tobias Blaise present her to the church as an Easter h-offering. It is an old saying: 'What is bought is cheaper than a gift'."

"Are you not afraid of her?" Catherine asked.

"Undoubtedly; but, by good fortune, she is also afraid of me. Our intercourse is a reign of terror."


"I'd sell her," Catherine declared positively.

The laughing eyes regarded her quizzically, and she interpreted their unspoken question. "That's true," she corrected herself, "you couldn't. Nobody'd buy her. Why don't you give her away?"

"I have no friend whose death I desire."

"She seems to be a fast animal," Catherine observed.

"At times," he replied, "she is very fast. But excessively fast. It is now three, four month she mek a record for rapidity. I have a call down Bayou Blanc; she prefer to promenade herself in the cane field of M'sieur Tobias Blaise; I recommend her to read the sign, everywhere posted: 'The Public is defended to eat the canes under penalty of the law.' She still proceed into the canes. I hinform her we mus' hasten down Bayou Blanc. She stand and look back. I beat her; she walk sideways. I continue to beat; she continue to walk sideways; she creep; she stop an' repose. I spik hasty to her. I renew to beat. I have a pain of the arm. The mosquitoes devour me.



I wish her in—" He made a motion with hands, shoulder, head. A motion apologetic, objurgatory. "*Enfin*," he explained, "I beat her all the way. At las' we arrive. It is four hour we are on the road to mek four mile. I tie her at the gate and enter to my penitent. I remark a sound—a tumult. The end of her rope 'ang to the gate post, but no Cauchemar is visible. Two mile up the Bayou I perceive a cloud of dust. She consume four minute to mek four mile. An' when I walk back, very weary, soak' with transpiration, perishing of sunstroke, I discover her devour the canes of M'sieur Blaise. Nex' day he come to mek complaint that I 'ave allow her to eat his canes; he wish to battle himself with me. I h-offer to restore to him Cauchemar in payment of the cane she have devour. He say no more. He retire in peace. Yes, she is a fast animal if she wish."

Miss Delicia appeared at the door with apologies for her delay.

She had evidently taken time to put on her best dress, a marvelous garment, dotted over with small white buttons that made her look as if she had been caught in a hail storm. Her thin, reddish hair was so tightly coiled and twisted at the back of her long, narrow head that she seemed unable to close her eyes. You wished to wink for her in looking at the inflamed lids, strained so wide open that a rim of white was visible all around the iris.

Catherine explained her errand and went inside where, to the discomfiture of all concerned, she dis-

covered Miss Victorine snatching up a bundle on her way to the back door from which she was evidently planning to escape unseen. Catherine realized that she had not treated Miss Victorine as kindly as she ought, but, without betraying her secret embarrassment, she stepped forward and cordially offered her hand. There was an almost imperceptible reluctance on the part of Miss Victorine, but she took it with a respectful, "*Bon jour, Mees Catrine,*" and Catherine had made peace with her neighbor.

Miss Victorine had evidently been trying on a dress which lay spread out on two chairs, and she was again withdrawing when Catherine asked her if she would not wait a moment so they could walk back together, adding with outward grace but some inward reservations, "I am glad of the opportunity of becoming acquainted with my neighbors in the country."

As they emerged, after the consultation with Miss Delicia — a consultation which concluded by Catherine's saying she would buy calico from the peddler's cart and have some more durable garments made than those she had brought from the city — Père Ignace rose from his capacious chair, laid his pipe on the edge of the bench, and walked with them down the path.

"How pretty the church is," Catherine observed, looking up at the tall, slender spire. "That is unusually graceful, I think."

"So it appear to me," Père Ignace agreed with evident gratification, "but, alas, it need repair."

"It is the fines' church in the parish," Miss Vic-

torine announced with pride, "an' the oldes'. That church was built by Noré Pinel, hein, Père Ignace? "

"It is a tradition that the foundation were laid by him," Père Ignace replied with a flicker of amusement in his eyes; "and if it please us to believe a tradition—" (He raised his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, and made a gesture of inquiry with both hands.) "Why not believe? "

With the natural grace and cordiality of the Creole, he opened the gate, thanking Catherine for the honor of a visit, and bidding them both a friendly *bon soir*.

As she turned toward the bridge, Catherine looked back. He was leaning on the gate, smiling after them and showing his shapely, yellow teeth.

XI

CATHERINE was born on the anniversary of Ronald's birth, and the day had been annually celebrated with special rejoicings. Now, as the day approached, she resolved to prepare a great celebration. Even in these desolate surroundings, it should be like the old times of unconstrained happiness. She would make him forget that, in a moment of perversity, because he would not (or perhaps could not) delay his trip to Washington, she had wounded him so deeply. The dead past should bury its dead. They would be cheerful together once more, and when this year's crop was made, and they had sold it for a phenomenal price, they would all go away from Espérance forever.

With these thoughts in her mind, she made ready for the birthday supper, planning, meantime, how, when they were seated around the fire, they would talk things over. She would ask him to have nothing to do with those vulgar neighbors, because they were personally so obnoxious to her that she did not wish to be thrown with them. Of course, if it were necessary to have business dealings with Mr. Blaise, that would be a different matter. But she wished never to be brought into personal contact with such persons. Then she thought somewhat uneasily that, perhaps, he would

ask her never to speak to Jacques Lirette again. She half wished he would, for that would prove that he was not quite indifferent to her actions. But she was sure she could persuade him that what he was mistaking for a sentimental interest was merely a kindly consideration, such as she entertained toward Miss Victorine.

Here she paused. The explanation sounded unconvincing. She would write it, very carefully, very diplomatically, in a note which she would wrap up with his birthday present. She rehearsed the wording to herself, smiling softly, as she cut up her only remaining linen blouse into handkerchiefs for Ronald, and hemmed them as painstakingly as if her whole plan depended on the length of her stitches.

On the morning of the momentous day she went out and watched for the peddler's cart, for she was going to surprise them with fruit as well as other dainties; furthermore, Marcelline needed salt and that too must be obtained from the cart. The keen wind sweeping up the bayou tinted her cheeks a vivid carmine and transfigured her from the pale, listless Catherine of the past few weeks.

The sound of rattling wheels became audible from up the road and presently Miss Victorine appeared, bouncing along in her jumper, accompanied by a pallid mite of a boy. "Good morning, Mees Catrine," she said, drawing rein, "It is your day of fête, is it not? You will permit me to felicitate?"

"Thank you," Catherine replied cordially, but won-

dering how Miss Victorine knew it was her birthday.

"Marcelline have commanded two dozen egg," the old lady explained. "The hen do not lay so good when it mek cold like to-day. But it is a time to kill people with cold, hein?"

"Yes, it is cold," Catherine agreed, rubbing her numb hands together. "Isn't the weather almost too severe for such a little fellow to be out?" smiling up at the puny face that looked pinched and blue, the tiny nose scarlet and the black eyes swimming in frosty tears.

"It ain't really so cold," Miss Victorine explained, "but it penetrate. I would not have bring him, but I have promise Mees Delicia — it is many time already. He are her godson."

"And what is your name, little man?" Catherine asked.

The child's watery eyes rolled in her direction, but he made no reply.

"Told the lady your name," Miss Victorine admonished; then, as he still maintained silence, she answered in his place, "He is name' Séraphin, but he are call' Feesclay."

"'Feesclay'," Catherine repeated in surprise. "Is Feesclay a nickname for Séraphin?"

"But no," Miss Victorine replied, surprised in turn, "it is no nick; it is a magic."

"A what?" Catherine asked.

"A magic. He have a rising — a very bad rising.

Two, three, *possiblement* more. See? ” removing his cap and showing the mark of a boil behind one ear. “ It is for that we call him Feesclay.”

More and more bewildered, Catherine listened in silence.

“ You comprehend,” Miss Victorine asserted; “ when nothing don’t cure a risings, you call him Feesclay. Then it disappear. But we are scared to call him Séraphin too quick. We will call him Feesclay until all the marks has went away.”

“ Miss Victorine,” said Catherine, dismissing the incomprehensible Feesclay, “ did you see the peddler’s cart up the road? Marcelline says we are out of salt.”

“ But you will permit me to give you some? ” said Miss Victorine, with her kindly, pursed-up smile. “ For salt you need not wait the peddler cart when the day mek cold like it do this mornin’.”

“ I am waiting for something else besides the salt, but Marcelline needs that as soon as possible, and I shall be most grateful to you if you can lend us some.”

“ Not ‘lend’; *geeve*,” Miss Victorine corrected. “ It is a sin to lend salt; it is a sin to borrow it.”

“ A sin? ” Catherine asked.

“ But yes,” Miss Victorine explained, “ that understands itself. If we are the salt of the earth, we must not borrow it; we must not lend. We must *geeve*! Is it not true? ”

“ Perhaps so,” Catherine replied, politely yielding to Miss Victorine’s superstition, “ and I am all the

more indebted to you. May I send right over for it — and for the eggs? ”

“ I will send, this hinstant,” said Miss Victorine, and with a polite “ *Au Revoir* ” and a parting but futile admonition to Feesclay to “ Mek his adieux at Mees Catrine,” she rattled homeward.

As she approached the bridge, Jacques Lirette came in sight, galloping up the bayou road. His dark hair blowing back from his face, his whole figure, lithe and slender, the very incarnation of youth and strength and beauty. There was a radiant light in his eyes, and Miss Victorine glanced back at Catherine for the explanation. She thought she had discovered it, for his expression was reflected on the fair, girlish face, and unmindful of the taciturn Feesclay, Miss Victorine exclaimed aloud: “ No! it is not possible! ” As she crossed the bridge, she looked back again, and seeing him swing himself down from the pony and stand beside Catherine, she repeated, “ It is not possible! It was not for *heem* she wait? ”

He had a basket on his arm, and as he looked down at her, Catherine’s eyes sank. There was a moment of self-consciousness on the part of both; then, first to recover himself, he spoke: “ I has somethin’ for you,” he said. “ We ben slaughterin’ to our house, an’ I brought you some of my maw’s hog’s head cheese. She kin *cook*! ” he exclaimed with evident pride. “ An’ so kin my sisters. My maw say girls don’t stand no chance of gettin’ husbands ef they don’t know how to cook — but I don’t know about that,” he added

quickly. "A girl can learn after she's married, hein?" He smiled at her, that sweet, that alluring smile that had made "all the girls betwix' Bergerac and the Gulf," fall in love with him.

Avoiding his eyes, and ignoring his words, she regarded the mixture in the bowl he handed her. "There are little green flakes all through it," she said. "They must be herbs of some sort, I suppose."

"See that?" he ejaculated. "You'll catch on jest as easy!" Then, in his soft, foreign voice, "That ain't true what Mr. Ronal' tole me?"

"Yes," she said with downcast eyes, "it was true when I left the city. I was —" She didn't know how to go on. What if she never heard from Adolphus Banks again? She wished she need never hear from him — never! And how could she explain the incredible situation to anyone? That she should have been treated with such contemptuous neglect! Although the time had in reality been short since she came to the country, it had seemed interminable to her. Then why pretend she was still engaged to him? It would put an end to these glimpses of Jacques which were among the few interests left her. But neither did she wish a declaration from him; that, equally, would put an end to their acquaintance, and so she left her sentence unfinished.

"It was true when you lef' the city," Jacques said softly, "but it ain't true now. The city is a fur ways off —"

"Oh, I don't know," she interrupted. "I don't want to talk about it."

"I know," he persisted gently. "You ain't engage' to nobody."

"I'm cold," she said, ignoring his words, "I must go into the house. Thank you so much for this — I've forgotten the name," and she walked away, forgetting the peddler's cart.

Fergus and Ronald were standing by the dining-room window while they waited for their breakfast. From that position, they had a distant view of the gate through the trees, and they saw Catherine and Jacques apparently deep in conversation. Then they watched her as she came up the path, bowl in hand. She was smiling and her cheeks were like roses, from the cold. Fergus glanced at Ronald, saying, "Evidently, she had ordered something from him."

"Possibly so," Ronald answered with apparent carelessness. "It isn't for me to interfere again, but her passion for admiration brings her into some peculiar positions. Banks had at least some of the outward attributes of a gentleman — but she may find it hard to make this Cajan understand exactly what she means by the language she is talking to him. He may not realize that all is fish that comes to her net." Ronald had never spoken so scornfully before.

"She's very young," Fergus said apologetically.

"Young?" Ronald questioned. "Do you call twenty-three 'very young'? When she was sixteen and seventeen her youth did excuse her. But now she ought to realize the danger. I hear his father is a

Cajan; but his mother is a Sicilian. That is a dangerous inheritance. The Sicilians are brought up on the blood feud. And here is Catherine, playing with that tigress's youngest cub! "

Meantime Catherine, with the bowl in her hand, had gone around to the kitchen door, where she found Ananias bringing armfuls of wood in to the house, while Pidgeon stood idle, at the foot of the steps, his neck wrapped in voluminous folds of a dingy woolen material, impossible to classify.

"Why, Pidgeon," she exclaimed, "what's the matter? Why aren't you carrying in the wood for Uncle Ananias? "

"My palate's down," he replied in a deep, bass voice.

Ananias, emerging from the kitchen door corroborated the statement and added, "I reckon his maw on-wrapped his hair too quick." Then, turning to Pidgeon, "Has you a misery in you haid? "

"Yassir," Pidgeon replied in basso profundo, "I shore, has."

"You mouter ben cunjured," Ananias hazarded in a tremulous falsetto. "Effen you is, you get you maw to put two bran new needles crossways in you hair when you goes to bed. En effen that don't cure you, make her sprinkle salt an' sawdust top er you haid."

Marcelline appeared at the kitchen door. "You go home," she said, "an' do like Unc' Nias tell you; an' me an' him'll fetch you suthin' fum dinner effen Miss

Catrine are willin'. Breakfus' are ready, Miss Catherine," and Catherine went to the dining-room, full of happy anticipations and unconscious of the suspicions she had aroused by waiting for the peddler's cart.

XII

CATHERINE sang as she took the last stitches in Ronald's handkerchiefs and wrapped them into as neat a parcel as possible where there was neither tissue paper nor narrow ribbon. Inside was the friendly little note wishing him happiness and expressing her sisterly affection. She untied the parcel and reread the note with the pleased consciousness of having been very good indeed — perhaps even excessively so.

Then she went out of doors to look for flowers with which to decorate. She knew where she could find the first violets, hidden away under their leaves, and where, in a sheltered corner of the garden, a row of pepper bushes still held some of their scarlet fruit. The thorny branches of the Chinese quince were covered with blossoms, and in spite of the biting cold, there were armfuls of roses in the garden.

By six o'clock the dining-room mantel was banked with flowers; the center of the table was a mass of roses and wild ferns which she had gathered with stiffening fingers in the drizzling rain, and everywhere were candles waiting to be lighted. By dint of incessant effort, the cavernous fireplace glowed with roaring flames that danced and flickered on the white-washed walls. The little, square parcel lay on Ron-

ald's plate where he could see it the moment he seated himself. How surprised he would be that, in this far land, she had been able to find a birthday present for him! . And the thought that he could not, by any possibility, have anything for her increased her pleasure. For once, she felt the sweetness of giving and not receiving.

After surveying the results of her work, she turned away with a happy look and carefully closed the door to keep in all the warmth and brightness. A fire was smouldering in her bedroom, but the air was so piercingly cold she could scarcely dress and she fumbled in trying to pin the pink roses on her breast. And yet, with her shining eyes and flushed cheeks, she was lovelier than ever she had looked in her life. One short year ago, she remembered, Fergus gave her her beautiful pearls. Where were they now, she wondered. Who was wearing them to-night? Never mind! . She would not think about them. They had not made her happy; nothing made her happy in those days; nothing satisfied her; nothing was good enough. Was that the reason why everything had been taken from her, she wondered. And now, she thought, I am poor but I am happy. She was in a state of exaltation.

Back to the dining-room to light the candles and take a last look at everything. Then she stood waiting, holding a slender foot to warm before the flames. Presently the outer door slammed as the wind caught it and there were footsteps in the hall. How astonished they would be when they saw the candles burn-

ing and the table covered with flowers! She stood looking expectantly toward the door. It opened, and Fergus entered.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "how lovely!" Standing by the fire he looked smilingly at her as he warmed his hands. "The fairest thing in mortal eyes," he said and, drawing her to him, kissed her.

Eagerly, she watched the door. What made Ronald so slow, she wondered.

Fergus spoke with a perceptible effort. "You may as well order supper," he said. "I don't believe Ronald will be back. Something must have happened to detain him."

"Where is he?" she asked.

"I believe—in fact I know—he went to Bergerac."

"To Bergerac!"

"Yes; he's been wishing for several days to go."

"I saw the automobile pass by," she observed in a measured tone, "but I didn't notice that he was in it." All the brightness had faded from her face as she rang for Marcelline and ordered supper. So this was the end of all her effort! This was all Ronald cared or remembered about their birthday! She was white with anger, but made no comment as she seated herself at the table.

"He had been wishing very much to go, for some days, and was planning to do so yesterday, in Octave Robichaux's lugger; but Octave disappointed him, and Placide says they came by and invited him—" He

stopped, feeling that his explanation was a lame one, and wondering himself that Ronald could have been so unfeeling. Remembering the trace of relentlessness in his character, Fergus feared this was done deliberately to wound Catherine. And yet it was the first time Ronald had ever been so inconsiderate. He would suspend judgment, and hope it was merely due to the levity of youth.

"Certainly," she said after a long pause in which she was trying to steady her voice, "he'd have been very foolish not to go — if he wished to. How dark it is!" with a glance at the uncurtained window.

"I'm so sorry to have nothing for you," Fergus said presently, "I tried —"

"Oh, Fergus dear," she interrupted gently, "I didn't expect anything. How could you give me anything?"

"I knew you'd understand," he said, "but you don't know, Cathie, how it hurt me."

She smiled tremulously at him across the table, bending to one side to look between the flowers and lights. "I think I do," she said.

Supper ended, Fergus drew their chairs before the fire and lighted his evening pipe. He rested his arm on her shoulder and they sat a long time in silence. The clock ticked on the mantel, the wind sighed and moaned in the chimney, and Catherine's thoughts wandered to other days. How easily she had been disappointed then! How hard to please! And now no

one cared to please her except dear, faithful Fergus — and — perhaps —

“It’s a wild night,” he said, breaking the silence; “hark how it is raining. I’m afraid Ronald won’t be able to get home. We mustn’t worry if he doesn’t. And,” he added with ill-concealed eagerness, “we mustn’t blame him; it won’t be his fault, I’m sure.”

“No,” she agreed, “I sha’n’t worry.” After a long silence, she suddenly broke out impetuously, “Fergus, Ronald isn’t happy here. Why does he stay? Grace Fessenden loves him and if he married her his future would be assured. I think Uncle Frank would give his consent. I wonder why he doesn’t go.” She wished Fergus would say that Ronald was staying because he couldn’t make up his mind to go.

Instead of that, he asked, “Have you any reason to suppose that Grace loves him? Has she ever said so?”

“No; but I know it,” Catherine declared, “and it would be so much better for him than to be here. Far more advantageous.” She paused. Would he accept his freedom, she wondered, or would he choose to stay here? And what would he think if Fergus told him she had proposed that he should go?

“I don’t agree with you,” Fergus replied. “Why would it be better — even admitting that Grace does love him — for him to marry a woman whom he does not love, merely because she has money? Even if he were willing to do so selfish a thing, I’m not sure it

would be an advantage to him. Think of the moral side, Catherine. Would it be better for him to go back and become Uncle Frank's pensioner; marry Grace for her money and lead an easy, sheltered life, than to fight it out bravely here? If the development of character is the chief end of existence — as I suspect it is — no one attains that end by running away from hardship. I suppose human conditions are valuable in proportion to their development of our power — not in proportion to our material gains nor our pleasure in life. No, I should be sorry to see him give up and go off to a life of ease with the Fessendens — unless his presence here makes you unhappy —”

“Oh, no,” she answered lightly, “I’m speaking only for his good. He’s welcome to stay as long as he wishes.”

“Besides,” Fergus added, following out a train of thought, “that is not his only alternative —”

“How so?” she asked.

“There are other things open.”

She waited for an explanation of his words, but he gazed musingly into the fire and remained silent. “Oh, Fergus,” she said, leaning forward for her good-night kiss, “I’m so tired.”

When she reached her room, her look changed. She was transported with anger. Wildly, she tore off the roses and crushed them. The little parcel which she had prepared with so much pleasure, she dashed on to the dying embers. It flared up and burned for a moment with a vivid light. Then, with a stifled cry, she

threw herself upon the bare floor whispering, "I'll never forgive him! Never! Never!"

Exhausted as she was, she must have fallen asleep, for she was dreaming of a vast, luxurious room with lights and mirrors and great, open windows through which the wind was blowing, when something roused her. At first she thought someone had knocked at her door, but in a moment she heard voices.

"Yes, I'll tell her in the morning," Ronald said, and then she heard him running lightly up to his room.

XIII

WHEN Catherine entered the dining-room the following morning, Ronald was waiting for her and began an immediate explanation of his absence from the birthday supper.

"Why," she interrupted with an air of surprise, "it wasn't of the slightest importance."

"I'd have been home in time," he persisted, "but the machine skidded so we nearly toppled into the bayou where the road makes that sharp turn just below the Old Burying Ground."

"What an appropriate place that would have been for the accident," she said, laughing gaily. "Think how it would have sounded in the Society Notes next Sunday. 'A brilliant party of joy riders ran into the bayou just below the Old Burying Ground and stuck hopelessly in the mud.' Do you remember the poem of the little boy who got caught in the tree by his hair? And the story ended: 'To-morrow we'll go out and take him down.' The neighboring planters would have rushed to get you out this morning."

He tried to reintroduce the subject, but she refused to listen seriously and only said, "Oh, Ronald, you never did have any sense of humor."

That afternoon she and Fergus were waiting in the

hall for the arrival of the mail. Their only communication with the outside world was by way of Bergerac, and not wishing to depend on the slow uncertainty of the peddler's cart for their letters, they sent Pidgeon on a weekly trip to the village. Presently Ronald came through the gate and up the long walk with his easy, swinging stride. Thin as a greyhound, yet athletic, his well-set head and square shoulders gave him a look of pride and obstinacy. The two watched him through the door which, characteristically of Southern people, they had left open in spite of the cold. He entered the hall, and likewise leaving the door open, came and stood by the fire.

"I wish we could manage to get some modern machinery for our sugar house," he said. "You know we can never compete with other planters, making this old-fashioned, open kettle sugar, by our wasteful, out-of-date methods. It's dreadful to be harassed with anxiety for ten months and then fail because we haven't the necessary utensils."

"We can't get them this year," Fergus replied.

"Oh, I know it," Ronald admitted. "I know it. I'm like a child crying for the moon. But when I see other people's sugar houses, with their improved methods, it drives me wild to think what we're working with. And here we are, subject to overflow, and struggling to make our crop against such odds —" He broke off and gazed frowningly into the fire.

"Money's the most important thing in the world," Catherine observed.

"No," said Fergus, "it's of third importance."

"How so?" she asked, but at this moment Pidgeon appeared with the mail and Fergus began assorting the letters while she and Ronald looked over his shoulders.

"Look," said Fergus, "they've mixed the Gold Mine mail with ours. 'Miss Modesta Blaise'," he read aloud, "'Miss Blaise', 'Miss Blaise'; she seems to have a monopoly of the correspondence at Gold Mine."

"Perhaps she's the only one knows how to read," Catherine suggested in an innocent tone.

"No," said Fergus, ignoring her words, "here's one for Tobias Blaise, Esq. Why!" with an astonished pause, "isn't that Marc Sutton's handwriting?"

"Certainly," said Catherine.

"That's just like Marc," Fergus declared. "I wrote to him about that boundary line above the Old Burying Ground, and you see he's attending to it right away. He's pure gold, Marc is."

"Do you think so?" Ronald asked.

"Why," Fergus exclaimed, "don't you?"

"I've wondered sometimes if there were not a good deal of alloy in his composition."

"I don't believe it," Fergus protested. "I've always found that he rang true. What makes you suspect him?"

"His neglect to forward your mail, and his absence from the city when I arrived were too opportune, it seemed to me, to be altogether accidental."

"Those coincidences do happen, Ronald. I have reason to know —" he broke off as if he had changed

his mind about finishing the sentence. Then, handing him a letter, "Here's one for you, Ronald."

"Nothing for me?" Catherine asked in a disappointed tone.

"Not this time, darling," Fergus answered, smiling up at her as one might at a child. "The next time, I hope."

Glancing at the superscription of his letter, Ronald exclaimed, "It's from Tom Ogers," then, running through its contents, "He may come to see us. Wouldn't that be the greatest luck? It might change the entire situation."

"It might indeed," said Fergus.

Ronald reread Tom Ogers's letter, smiling unconsciously the while, then, catching up those for Gold Mine, said, "I'll take these over for you, Fergus."

"Perhaps," Fergus suggested, "it might be just as well not to mention Tom's visit to any one — at least until it's a certainty."

"Yes, I know," Ronald agreed. "We may be disappointed, but I don't believe we shall. He'll come," and whistling gaily, ran down the steps.

Catherine was annoyed at his light-heartedness. He had not spoken to her and had made a parade of going to Gold Mine with the letters. "Why would it be such an advantage to have Mr. Ogers visit here?" she asked.

"He might become interested in the plantation and advance us the money we need for our crop," Fergus explained in an abstracted tone as he unfolded the

paper and handed her the sheet marked, "Society Notes."

She began reading. "Fergus," she exclaimed, "May Vincent and George Burbank have anonounced their engagement."

"That's good," he said, resting his paper on his knee and looking at her with an expression of pleasure. "I'm very glad."

"I always liked May," said Catherine, "but I thought George Burbank a commonplace person."

"So did I," said Fergus, "until trouble came." He paused and resumed his reading.

"How so," she asked, "'until trouble came'?"

"I never told you how Burbank expressed sympathy," he said. "He had some money — his life's savings — a few thousand dollars, and he offered to lend it all to me without security. There's not one man in a million would have done that."

"But he knew he could trust you."

"Yes," he answered in a constrained tone, "he believed in me when no one else did. He has a heart of gold. Such generosity and faith are not commonplace."

"No," she agreed; then, after a pause, "How do you account for Uncle Frank's not offering to help us? I've often wondered."

Fergus answered with evident effort, "He had lost faith in my capacity for business — not in my honesty, I truly believe. But I have lost credit — and to lose credit is ten thousand times worse than to lose

money. Credit is capital. A man may afford to risk money; he's a fool if he risks his credit." There was an unusual ring of bitterness in his tone, but in a moment he added in a kindlier voice, "And you know his money is not his own. When a man is using his wife's capital he has to be doubly careful; and your Aunt Kate is not sentimental."

"I think she might be decently liberal," said Catherine, "seeing I'm named for her."

"She's a very keen business woman," Fergus explained, "and possibly she thinks he married her for her money. You know it used to be said that all the Fessendens married for money. But that was not true of all," he added hastily, remembering that Catherine's mother was a Fessenden.

Silently she resumed her reading of the Society Notes. So many new names had crept into the exclusive set, she reflected. Presently, she came upon this item: "Miss Belle Snively has returned from a delightful visit to Gold Mine plantation, the palatial country home of Miss Modesta Blaise." So Belle had been in the country again and had not communicated with her. But it could not be otherwise after the discourtesy shown to Modesta here at Espérance. At the top of the next page, she read: "Miss Modesta Blaise, who has been entertaining a numerous house party at her magnificent country home, Gold Mine, took her guests to the sea shore on Thursday last for a day's outing on her beautiful new launch, The Fair Modesta." She wished she had a launch and could go

down the bayou to Barataria Bay; or that she had an automobile and could explore all the country. She thought longingly of her own little electric runabout. Who was riding in it now, she wondered.

"Fergus," she said, "if Mr. Ogers doesn't come, wouldn't it be right to let George Burbank lend us that money? We're sure to make an immense crop; and sugar's getting a good price, isn't it?"

As she spoke, Ananias appeared, hat in hand. "I reckon Pidgeon los' dishyer, somewheres," he said, handing Fergus a letter. "M'sieu Jacques pick it up somewheres."

"How long have you had it?" Fergus asked, glancing at the date on the soiled and crumpled envelope.

Ananias scratched his head in perplexity. What would be best, he wondered; to speak the truth, or to brave it out and say Jacques had that moment brought it.

"You have had it a week," Fergus said accusingly. "You must not be careless with the mail. Tell Pidgeon I wish to see him."

By one of those premonitions that come to us all occasionally, Catherine knew what Jacques Lirette had brought. Why, oh why, had she not written to Adolphus Banks as she had planned!

Opening the letter, she read:

"My Dear Catherine:

"What shall I say in answer to your letter telling me that you were accepting me after long hesitation? If

you love me, why did you hesitate? And if you do not, why did you finally accept my offer?

"Emerson says that every action should be measured by the sentiment from which it proceeds. And you have assured me a thousand times that there was no sentiment in your nature. Then why do you bind yourself with promises that you cannot fulfill?

"I might wish to shelter you from the storm and restore to you the brightness of life, but I am too intimately acquainted with human nature to believe that the mere surrounding you with comforts could make you happy when you were bound by irksome ties.

"No, my dear girl, I cannot accept such a sacrifice from you, and I restore the freedom which you have renounced.

"Wishing you happiness in your new surroundings, I am

"Very truly yours,

"ADOLPHUS BANKS."

Fergus glanced uneasily at her as she read, for he had recognized the handwriting. She was very pale and still, with a certain steadfastness of expression. What had the scoundrel written, he wondered.

For a time she sat perfectly quiet with the open letter in her hand. How she had complicated her life by engaging herself to that bad, dishonorable man! She recalled Ronald's ironical tone when he said that now Adolphus Banks had the opportunity to prove his

disinterestedness. She felt herself burn with shame. How she had played the fool!

Springing to her feet, she dashed the letter into the fire and went out on to the gallery. As she stood looking down the bayou, thinking of all that had befallen her, a horseman flew by on his way to Bergerac. Had he really passed, or was it a wraith, a spirit of the woods and clouds, evoked from her imagination?

Fergus too, had seen the figure and with an intuitive perception of danger came and stood beside her.

"That letter was from Adolphus Banks," she said in a low tone.

"I recognized the handwriting," he replied. "You had written to him, had you not?"

"No, Fergus; but he releases me." With a sob she added, "I'm glad." Then burying her face against his breast, "I'm not crying about him. I never loved him — but everybody —"

"I know," he murmured soothingly, "I understand."

XIV

CATHERINE was seated on the sheltered side gallery, reading a letter from May Burbank, inviting her to come to the city and make her a visit. It contained innumerable items of news, for May had always been full of small talk. That was one reason, Catherine remembered, why she was popular. Not malicious nor gossipy in an unpleasant sense, but full of the news of the day.

"Do come," the letter urged, "I want you to see my little house, and George and I want to take you to the opening of the Country Club. It's a lovely building, right on the Bayou St. John, between that and the City Park. I know you'd like it. I wish you could come in time for Belle Snively's wedding. She's going to marry a cousin of your old beau, Adolphus Banks. He is coming down to be best man at Belle's wedding, and that girl from your parish that she's always visiting — that Miss Blaise — is to be maid of honor. I suppose you know her, but Belle said you lived on different bayous and didn't see each other often. Angelina Horn is to be matron of honor. It's to be a very grand party — twelve bridesmaids and three flower girls. Do come, Catherine. We'll have

such lots of fun sitting in the gallery and looking down on the procession. It's to be at Trinity, and the chancel will be a dream, I know, although I do think they've half spoiled it putting in those choir stalls. Don't you remember how we sat up there at Mary Harris's wedding? We admired the groom so in his white suit, and all those other navy men attending. That was the prettiest wedding I ever saw, but it wasn't grand as this is going to me. They say the man isn't rich, and every one's wondering how Belle can afford such grand goings-on; but I'm glad she can, if she wants it. It must be a satisfaction to be so fine once in one's life, though I can say from experience that a little, plain, home wedding is just as happy."

The letter ran on for several pages more and Catherine, with a pang of bitterness, reflected upon the changes in her life. Belle Snively, that girl whom she she brought into prominence by including her in her court, had not invited her, Catherine Maine, to her wedding! And Adolphus Banks, and Modesta Blaise would play important parts in the great pageant! Her lip curled. Common people, all of them, she thought, in spite of their pretentiousness. But May was not common. How kind she was! In an agony of homesickness, she longed to go; to be a part of that world once more. To have clothes to wear, and her own beautiful home, and to be the Catherine Maine of other days. But in a moment she realized what a humiliation it would be to her to see her former friends, who, perhaps, believed Fergus to be dishonest, and

who would laugh at her poverty. Friends? No, such people were not friends. She didn't belong there — nor here — nor anywhere.

The voices of Chukey and Marcelline reached her where she sat. Marcelline was in the milk-shed, carrying pan after pan into the cool, dark closet under the cistern. The mellow, African voice would grow faint as she went into the closet, and louder as she came back into the shed. Finally she sat down and began churning.

"Did you seen the ottermobile go up the high road jes' now?" Chukey inquired from the wash-house door.

"I smelled it," Marcelline answered laconically.

"Miss Modesta shore look fine," said Chukey.

"I reckon so," Marcelline answered coldly.

"Why ain't she quality, same's our Madam?" Chukey asked.

"'Case she ain't; tha's why."

"But she shore are pretty, an' she dress fine, an' Miss Drusilla Zeek say they is got more silver dishes in they pantry than what our Madam is got pots in her kitchen."

"Then you go long wuk to Gole Mine, effen you craves to," Marcelline retorted sternly. "You wants to know why they isn't quality? 'Case they money war stole; tha's why. Miss Modesta's grandaddy war overseer, right yeah to Espérance, an' he stole every blessed thing he could lay han's on. I know, me, 'case my gran-paw war one er the things what he stole. An' he hid him up yonder by the gas pocket, an' he 'low a

alligator had et him. He war the alligator," she muttered. "An' that war the very fust nigger them people owned — an' you asks why is they trash? They has bad blood — them people — thief's blood; low-down, common, white-trash blood; you hear me? "

"All the same," Chukey retorted defiantly, "Mr. Ronal' are goin' to marry Miss Modesta."

"Well," Marcelline answered slowly, "effen he cuts off his nose, I don't see what he'll do with the rest of his face."

"All the same —" Chukey began, when the sound of wheels interrupted her, and up the path from the wagon gate, a cart slowly wobbled along on loose wheels that creaked and protested at every revolution.

Catherine, leaning forward to catch a glimpse of the newcomer, beheld the counterpart of Father Time seated in a two-wheeled cart, and huddled behind him, a sorrowful congregation of chickens and turkeys. He sat bunched up with his chin close to his knees, his hat on the back of his head, and a corncob pipe in his mouth.

"Howdy, M'sieur Poisson," Marcelline said politely as the cart rounded the corner of the house and drew up at the milk shed. "Is you brang them chicken you promise? "

Very deliberately he replied to her question: "I has brang you chicken an' tukkey. Them tukkey was feed on puccon, an' my wife say to me, 'Volcar,' she say, 'you is trow away you puccon. Them city people

don't know no diffunce twix' tukkey what are raise' on puccon, an' tukkey what are raise' on oyscher shell."

"This," Catherine thought bitterly, "is all that is left me in life. These are my companions. There are no interests left me," and she was blind to the beauty all about her: to the branches swathed in trailing moss; the deep, soft grass with here and there an early wild flower showing its timid face; the broad, brown fields stretching to the foot of the somber forest. Unnoticing, she breathed the fragrance of the upturned soil and the faint perfume of the feathery foliage. She was deaf to the soft, mysterious sounds of nature — those sounds which enhance the stillness: the twittering of birds, the little creakings and rustlings of the trees. Of all these things, she was unconscious, wrapped only in her passionate loneliness.

Marcelline rose from her churning, and in spite of the turkeys' protesting gobbles, felt of their razor-like breast bones. "They's turr'ble thin, M'sieur Poisson," she said, "an' they looks turr'ble ole. I don't reckon the Madam crave to have no such Methusalems in her chicken yard."

"Methusalems! " he repeated indignantly, "they is jes' crezzy to get them to Gole Mine."

"Then you bes' carry them to Gole Mine," she replied.

Ananias now joined the group. "They looks like they has the pip," he observed disparagingly.

"Nias," said Monsieur Poisson, ignoring this last

insult, "is you saw my red cow anywheres? He are los', now, it are two day."

Ananias shook his head, still examining the turkeys. "They looks mighty pindlin' an' ageable to me," he remarked.

"Nias," Monsieur Poisson resumed, "Ef my red cow come trapezin' anywheres roun' yere, you push him along to'ards the Ole Buryin' Groun', you hear? He are los', an' I don' know who's got him."

"I reckon your cow are daid," Ananias replied by way of comfort. "I seen a flock of buzzards over yonder by the swamp; soon, this mornin'."

Chukey now joined the group by the wagon. "I seen M'sieur Pierre up to Bergerac, las' Sunday," she said. "He sure do look fine an' peart. They tells me he are wukkin' to the bank."

Monsieur Poisson nodded slowly. "My boy Pierre are the smartes' boy on the bayou," he agreed. "They is pay him forty dollar a mont', an' ef he ax fur it, they is goin' to give him — I dunno how much."

"I'd ax fur it; me," said Ananias. "An' does they eat him, M'sieur Poisson?"

"At the moment," Monsieur Poisson replied, puffing ruminatively, "he eat himself. More later, he will be — I don't know what. An' then they will eat him to the hotel."

This statement produced a sensation among his hearers.

"You sure mus' be proud, M'sieur Poisson," Chukey said deferentially.

The old man nodded and taking his pipe from his mouth, spat musingly. "They was over by the swamp?" he questioned as he drew up the lines.

"Yassir," Ananias replied politely, "nigh on to M'sieur Zelinka's house. A whole flock — hit look like all the buzzards in this part er the parish war over yonder to a camp meetin'. Hit mus' er ben you red cow, I reckon."

Slowly Monsieur Poisson wobbled away, his eyes fixed on the distant horizon in search of the flock of buzzards which would serve as a guide in the search for his cow.

"Ain't that a shame?" Chukey commented, watching the retreating figure, "M'sieur Pierre look jes' ez sassy as a jay bird, with a gole watch chain, an' grease on his hair. An' look at his paw!"

"He look like what he are," Ananias interrupted. "He look like a chicken gentleman, an' tha's what he are."

"No use strainin' fer a persimmon what's beyond you reach," Marcelline said thoughtfully. "Ef you borrows somebody else's pole to knock it down with, anybody kin pick it up. M'sieur Pierre ain't goin' to set the bayou afire, fer all the bear's grease on his haid. I reckon his homely brother Zelinka'll out-hoe him — specially sence he've marry Ottinsia Lirette, a good, homely girl what don't let the grass grow in under her feet. Heap er times, it's lucky to be homely."

"Well," said Chukey, "plenty folks is lucky, then."

From across the bayou came the sound of a church bell, now loud, now faint, as the breeze brought it or carried it away. Marcelline stood, her arms crossed upon her breast, listening. "Who that bell a-tollin' for, I wonder," she said.

Chukey turned her inky face toward the sound and listened. "You know who it are?" she hazarded. "I lay hit are ole M'sieur Cyrille Thibodaux, over to Bayou Blanc. He war tuk mighty bad yestiddy, an' they sont fur Miss Victorine to come an' help nuss him. He mus' be daid. Uhn! Uhn! Ain't that turr'ble?"

"No," said Marcelline, "tha's fair. We all has to die, an' hit war his turn."

But it was not old Monsieur Thibodaux, for presently there swept up the bayou a fleet of boats, sailing slowly along. They stopped at the church landing. Then the men lifted a coffin from the deck of the first boat and carried it up the bank into the church. The voice of Père Ignace, intoning the service, reached Catherine where she sat listening with a faint, detached interest. Presently she heard a sound of chanting, a wavering, plaintive sound, and soon thereafter the little group of people came out of the church and walked slowly down the bank. First, Père Ignace, then the pall bearers with the coffin which they placed on a sort of platform and covered with a white cloth, then the rest of the company, silently taking their places. The boats were loosed from their moorings and swept

majestically onward, the vast, crimson sails and the deep blue sky above reflected in the brown bosom of the bayou with a pomp of coloring too splendid for any but the royal dead.

XV

WHILE the cool, spring weather lasted, there were long evenings which Fergus and Catherine spent together. Unconscious of her own selfishness, she would interrupt his writing to pour out to him — her one companion and friend — the tale of her loneliness and ennui. He had ceased to remonstrate or suggest any cure for her troubles, but, looking up from his work, would listen in silence or with an occasional word of sympathy. So absorbed was she in her own lamentations, in an unrecognized enjoyment, perhaps, of her self-pity, that she failed to perceive the weariness in his tone. Once, however, when Ronald happened to be with them (a rare occurrence now-a-days) she was startled into silence by the expression of his stern gray eyes. What was he thinking, she wondered. He had said nothing, but his very silence, she thought, implied that she ought to find occupation for those interminable hours of which she complained. What ought she to do, she wondered. She, Catherine Maine, who had never been taught to work. Did he think she ought to go out like the bayou women and labor in the fields? What was this new fetish of efficiency that he worshipped? ”

The others began talking. They were wondering if they could rent a dredge boat, as they were unable to buy one.

"Blaise has one," Ronald said. "I think he'd let us have it for a week or so at a reasonable price. I'll ask him to-morrow, and wouldn't it be well at the same time to speak to him about the veterinary surgeon that's coming down to vaccinate his stock? Undoubtedly there is *charbon* in this parish, and we can't afford to lose our mules."

"How perfectly hideous to have to think of such things!" Catherine exclaimed. "Vaccinating mules!" She shuddered. "Going over and over the same things, day after day. Working with such poor materials — there's nothing great and fine in such a life."

"I don't agree with you, Cathie," Fergus interposed gently. "I think it is 'great and fine' to get good results out of poor materials. Better, probably than it would have been to finish my book."

The following day the weather changed as if a window had opened and summer poured through. The birds sang, the bees hummed, the flowers blossomed, but with the advent of these lovely things, all the insect world awoke and Catherine found herself robbed of her evenings; for at twilight, the air was filled with mosquitoes humming in tall columns above her head; nipping and stinging her unbearably, until, in self-defense, she was driven to adopt the early hours of the bayou people.


"I certainly never imagined I'd have to go to bed

with the chickens," she complained, "and hide under a mosquito bar to escape the mosquitoes."

"We have merely advanced the clock," Ronald declared. "Our days begin with sunrise; that's the only difference. We really have more hours for work."

"Yes, for work," she repeated in an aggrieved tone, but later she pondered his words. He thought of nothing but work, she reflected, and Fergus thought of nothing else. There was no room left in their scheme of life for any of the pleasant things. It was all a struggle and a battle and Ronald apparently thought she ought to plunge in and do as they did. Very well, she would. She would work so hard that her health would fail, and then even he would be sorry for the hardships she had endured, and the unbearable loneliness. She would work until her hands were blistered; until they bled. Yes, she would work until Ronald himself begged her to stop.

In pursuance of this plan, she gathered an armful of yellow jessamines and went up the steep stairs to his room. Pausing in the doorway, she looked at the comfortless scene. Boots and shoes were scattered about; soiled clothing lay heaped in one corner; pipe, collar buttons, a broken knife, odds and ends of every sort littered the dusty mantel-piece. The mouldy mirror gave a shadowy reflection of her figure as she stood, her arms full of flowers. She would begin with the mirror, she determined. She would twine long sprays of jessamine around the frame to hide the places where the gilding had flaked off.



In order to do this, she must stand on a chair. The only one at hand was covered by a pile of clean clothing Chukey had deposited on it, days and days ago. In fact, it seemed an accumulation from several weeks of washing. Catherine took the pyramid of starched linen and heaped it on a shelf in the armoire. It did not as yet occur to her that she might mend the frayed and torn garments, sew on the buttons and darn the socks. The thought of making herself useful was still nebulous and more in the way of self-justification than anything else.

She was crowding the clean shirts on to one of the shelves of the armoire, when an avalanche descended upon her from above: collars, cuffs, all the odds and ends of clothing that men relegate to the upper shelves, resolving to use them when the present supply is worn out. She was gathering them up from the floor, thinking that she had a needless quantity, when her mind reverted to the fact that she had come, not to put the room in order, but to make it attractive. So, leaving the wreckage where it had fallen, she crossed the room to get the flowers which she had laid on the table between the two windows. At this moment, a breeze, laden with the scent of orange blossoms, swept some papers to the floor. Picking them up, she replaced them on the table, and as she did so, her eyes were drawn to a signature in an exaggeratedly angular hand: "As ever, Modesta."

It was written on the back of a photograph. Without intending anything dishonorable, Catherine studied

the snap shot of a group on board the Blaisses' launch. In the center was Modesta Blaise, all in white and showing her teeth: supposedly laughing. In fact, all of the group were laughing. What was there so amusing about having a snap-shot taken aboard a launch? Catherine questioned scornfully while studying Modesta's face. Yes, it was pretty; a plebeian, dimpled prettiness, sure to be lost in embonpoint before she was ten years older. The picture looked her straight in the eyes, laughing. "As ever," Catherine thought with a pang. Yes, the overseer's daughter had triumphed. She herself had made no outward effort to retain Ronald. On the contrary, she had maintained that she did not wish him to stay in the country; that he was at perfect liberty to leave Espérance, that, in fact, it was a matter of utter indifference to her whether he went or stayed. But now, as she gazed at that laughing, triumphant face, and read those words, "As ever, Modesta"; as she realized that he had actually accepted his freedom from her, a feeling of bewilderment came upon her, followed by a deep sense of isolation. So alone, she thought, so alone!

Under the window, the mellow voices of Marcelline and Chukey rose in conversation.

"Does you know who that were they bury yestiddy, Miss Marcelline?" Chukey was saying.

"I isn't year tell," Marcelline replied, pausing in the scrubbing of her milk pans.

"Miss 'Ortense Trosclair," said Chukey with evident enjoyment of the sensation she was producing.

"Fer the Lawd's sake!" Marcelline ejaculated, dropping the scrubbing brush with a rattling sound. After an instant's silence, she said, "You means the young Madam—not Miss Hortense. It was Miss Rosaline what was pindlin'—Not Miss Hortense."

"Hit were Miss 'Ortense what die," Chukey persisted. "The young Madam are as peart as ever, an' more pearter, now Miss 'Ortense are daid."

"Who tole you all them tales, Chukey?" Marcelline asked in a stern voice.

"My ole man done tole me, an' wha's more, he ben down yonder, an' he seen Unc' Timothy Brim, an' pears like it were Mr. Ovide what found her a-settin' in her cheer, a-smilin', like she were asleep. My ole man went down yonder a-fishin' yestiddy."

"Fer the Lawd's sake!" Marcelline repeated, slowly resuming her work. "I reckon she are glad," she added after a long pause.

"I reckon so," Chukey agreed cheerfully. "The young Madam were always a-tellin' her how it were charity to keep her an'—"

"Well, the young Madam don't need to do no more charity. An' Miss Hortense don't have to swallow no more of them dry crust. When people like the young Madam helps you, they crams they charity down you throat half a dozen times. You has to swallow them mouldy crust five or six times, an' you ain't never sure it ain't a-goin' to choke you. An' she are daid! Uhn! Uhn!"

"How come the Trosclairs doesn't bury themselves to home like quality?" Chukey demanded.

"I'llt war this-a-way," Marcelline answered in a slow, solemn voice. "Time er the big storm, the tombs to Malabar got all wash away. Then the crop fall, an' they-alls 'gun to git porer an' porer, an' they-alls 'lowed they w'a'nt goin' to be everlastin' buildin' tombses jes' to wash away; an' with that, they tuk an' bulld up to the Ole Buryin' Groun'. An' sence then, they ain't made no more good crops. 'Taint good to get mad at God an' make you brags what you is goin' to do. But," with a deep sigh that was almost a groan, "heap er times we all is sorry fur what we has did; niggers, an' trash, an' quality. I reckon they was sorry, plenty times, that they 'gun to bury theyselves up yonder like trash. Quality ain't got no call to mix up with trash, not even when it's daid. An' now Miss Hortense are there — the purties' an' the proudest' of them all. But I reckon she war so heart-hurted she didn't keer whar they bury her. When she went on that far journey, to them furrin parts, she war purtier'n a angel."

"She didn't favor no angel to me," Chukey interrupted Marcelline's soliloquy.

"Huhn?" Marcelline grunted interrogatively. Then, with sudden severity, "You hesh that nonsense, Chukey."

"Yas'm, she war purty, I reckon, but not angel-purty. She war too sinful. She didn't have no

"Now you hesh, Chukey!" Marcelline commanded. "Remember, the tongue are a oily an' a slippery member, but it ain't goin' to wag lessen you makes it. Ef you speaks them hard words, you is goin' to be sorry fer it, same's the young Madam are goin' to be sorry. An' sorry are a mighty dry crust to swallow. But you mark my words, when we-all gits to heaven, an' sets to the table of the Lawd, with crownds on our haid, an' harps in our moufs, Miss Hortense will be there. She'll sure be there."

Their voices rose in mellow cadence to where Catherine stood, and gradually their meaning penetrated her soul. Hortense Trosclair was dead! Hortense Trosclair, whom she loved, whose love she had coveted. Dead! Dead! The blight that fell on everything belonging to her, had fallen on Hortense Trosclair. "Because I loved her!" she thought. There was a fierce pang in her grief as of the hunted creature that could find no hiding place. "She is dead," she thought with lips compressed to keep herself from crying out, "and over there—"

She turned away from the window as she caught a distant gleam of the red roof of Gold Mine shining through the trees like a splotch of blood.

XVI

ANANIAS looked surprised when, the following morning, Catherine told him to get ready to drive to the Old Burying Ground, and to bring a rose bush from the garden to plant beside a grave. She made no explanations. Why should she acknowledge that, in spite of the humiliating visit to Malabar, she had still cherished a hope of gaining Hortense Trosclair's friendship? Why should she lay bare her soul? She must fight her battle alone.

After they had started, she told him to go back and get her a young cedar tree. Although she could not have explained the impulse, it seemed to her that the dark, mysterious cedar was more appropriate to that silent soul than the rose bush she was bringing. Ananias, deeply versed in plantation lore, studied her countenance for a clue to her conduct. He knew that to plant a cedar tree invariably brought bad luck; but how could it injure the dead? And whom did she wish to harm? Then, remembering the recent funeral, and connecting that with the trip to Malabar, he arrived at a partial truth. It was beside Hortense Trosclair's tomb she wished to plant it. And, putting two and two together, recalling the return in the early morning, the all-night journey, the proverbial inhos-

pitality of the Trosclairs, he decided that his young Madam was wreaking a belated vengeance upon her distant kinswoman.

Pondering these things, he returned, cedar tree in hand, and Catherine, looking back, saw him shake his head as he talked to himself. Certainly, he thought, it was unlike a quality lady to be "conjuring" any one, alive or dead. But the impulse of revenge, so deeply imbedded in the primitive mind, was one he could understand, and even while he recognized it as one of the unconfessed motives of the "quality," he regarded his mistress with a new respect.

It was still so early that, as they followed the windings of the bayou, the dew was not yet dried on the grass. Over all the vegetation spread a soft, purplish haze, like the bloom of the plum, and the early sunlight striking on the polished surface of the lily leaves, on the points of the yuccas and palmettoes where drops of dew were hanging, flashed back a myriad jewels of ruby and emerald and sapphire. Over all the distant landscape there was a soft blur of mist above which the tree tops loomed like shadowy islands.

The road ran along the edge of the bayou for several miles above the Catholic church, then it went through a tract of thick woods and when it came out at the other side, it had left the bayou some distance on the right and was skirting the rear of the Old Burying Ground. Through a break in the trees, she saw the tall, white cross on the bayou's bank, but on this side, within the black picket fence, rose another cross

about twenty feet high, on which was an attenuated figure painted in bright colors and emphasizing the gruesome details of wounds and blood. The mournful eyes seemed to look down on the straggling paths bordered with tombs on which hung wreaths of black and white beads with the interwoven words: "*Ma Mère*," "*Mon Père*," "*Ma Soeur*," "*Mon Frère*," or most frequently of all, the word "*Regrets*," so inadequate to the Anglo-Saxon mind.

Catherine dismounted at the gate, passing a covered wagon painted black, which she knew to be the "undertaker's wagon," and at a distance she saw a group of mourners about an open grave. Following Ananias to the opposite side of the Burying Ground, she stopped at a neglected-looking brick tomb. Some effort had recently been made to repair it, and propped against one corner, was a broken urn filled with flowers. The stone door was covered with inscriptions, and at the bottom was the freshly cut name of Hortense Félicie Trosclair. Nothing else. No date, no comment of any sort, no word of sorrow or of hope.

At Catherine's bidding, Ananias planted the rose tree, then murmuring a charm under his breath to ward off any possible harm, he planted the cedar. As he was pressing down the loose earth with his foot, a voice reached them—a voice of prayer. She had barely noticed the little group beside an open grave, so deep was her own absorption, but now she read the story of their lives in the poor, flimsy mourning garments, the pale, pinched faces, the toil-hardened hands.

Tears ran down their faces as they knelt in prayer and Catherine, silently joining in their petition, was unconscious of the tears on her own cheeks. Then, as she stood praying, though with no outward sign of prayer, a silence seemed to steal into her soul. She might not, herself, have called it resignation, but the storm and anger and despair of the past weeks, seemed, for the moment, a part of another life than hers. She felt that she belonged with these unknown toilers — the patient children of the soil. Without a vestige of pride — that cruel pride that made her feel herself a being apart, a creature singled out for suffering, alone and above the ignorant bayou people — she turned to go, and with a last, unspoken farewell to Hortense Trosclair, she walked quietly away, giving a glance of gentle sympathy to the group now filing out of the graveyard with their burden of want and toil and bereavement.

The dew had dried on the grass as they drove homeward. From time to time, Ananias gave a backward glance as if to study the landscape; in reality, to scrutinize his mistress's face. If he had rightly understood the mystery of the cedar tree, why had she wept beside the tomb? And why was she now so calm and still? There was no trace of joy or triumph in her expression, as of satisfied revenge. What was the meaning of it all?

They approached the wooded stretch and drove noiselessly over the thick carpet of leaves. Suddenly, at no great distance, a blinding light flashed up, there

was a roaring of flames, a shout, and two men dashed out of the thicket into the road.

"The gas pocket!" Ananias ejaculated.

One of the men was tall and black-haired, with a large, pale face. The other was a small, weazened person with gray hair. But as quickly as they had appeared, they dashed back out of sight, and it was doubtful whether they had noticed the vehicle at the turn of the road. "Uhn! Uhn!" Ananias piped in his mournful treble, "I lay them two is conjurin' you-alls gas pocket. Mr. Tobias ain't got no call to be foolin' long of you-alls woods, an' neither hasn't Mr. Marks."

"What was that fire?" Catherine asked.

"The Gas Pocket."

"I don't understand. What is a gas pocket?"

"It are a pond uv water — mighty deep an' dark — an' effen you lights a leaf or anythin', an' draps it top er the water, hit burn like you seen it." Then he added with a chuckle, "They wasn't lookin' fer no sech vi-g'rous noise. Hit skeered 'em."

"Ananias," she said, "was that really Mr. Marc Sutton? Have you ever seen him?"

"Who? Mr. Marks? Sure I has seen him. I seen him las' week, a-pyrootin' roun' on tother bayou with Miss Modesta. Sure I has seen him. Yas'm, that were him."

So Mark Sutton had been out in this parish, so near, and yet had made no effort to see her who was his queen! Looking back, as the road wound toward the

bayou, she saw the red light of the gas flames still gleaming between the trees. And as she looked, the world came crowding upon her once more; with the keen, pressing anxieties of her present life.

“Oh,” she thought, “if only Tom Ogers would come! ”

XVII

AS the season progressed and the need of money for cultivating the crop grew more pressing, the thoughts of all centered more and more on the coming of Tom Ogers. If only he could see Espérance for himself, they said, he would surely advance the necessary amount. But week after week passed and no answer came to Ronald's letters. The strain of expectancy was so acute that there was no longer a pretence of concealing it. On mail day, Fergus and Ronald came to the house early, and Catherine flitted back and forth, to and from the gate, nervously watching for Pidgeon.

May came and still no word from Tom Ogers. One evening when Catherine was watching at the gate, Miss Victorine approached from up the bayou, riding in her rickety jumper, bowing and smiling and waving a long stalk tipped with a cluster of flowers. The back of the vehicle was bristling with vegetables which protruded from under the seat.

"Good evening, Miss Victorine," said Catherine, going out to the roadside to shake hands with the old lady, "did you pass Pidgeon on the road?"

"No," Miss Victorine acknowledged with regret. "Hi didn't went that way. Hi cross the other bridge

an' then I went back in the wood, back of the Ole Buryin' Groun' to buy some chicken of M'sieur Poisson. He tole my Placide he have plenty Rhode Red Islan's."

"Oh, has he?" Catherine exclaimed with interest. "Marcelline says I ought to try to get some for my chicken yard."

"They ain't Rhode Red Islan's," said Miss Victorine; "he mek a mistake when he call them that."

"What are they?"

"Chicken; jes' nothin' but chicken."

"I don't think he's honest," said Catherine. "He promised to bring us some young chickens and turkeys — and you ought to have seen them."

"I did. He try to sell them to me. He is hones', if you will, Mees Catrine, but they is different kind of hones'. They is hones' what you can buy from in the dark, an' they is hones' what oblige you to carry a lantern."

"I call that dishonest," Catherine declared with emphasis.

"Yes," Miss Victorine agreed regretfully; "yes, but when a family is very poor, but very, very poor an' *passablement* large — sixteen children —"

"Sixteen!" Catherine ejaculated. "But that is horrible."

"Large family is the fashion on the bayou," Miss Victorine said with her cheery smile. "On Bayou Blanc, near the Gulf, is the family Jabart with twenty-three children. An' one day a peddler pass by — they

don't often went so far — an' he persuade the father to buy spectacle for all his family him, his ole lady, an' twenty-three children. The peddler tell him, ef they didn't need them spectacle right now, they might before he pass by again. An' every Sunday an' every feast day, when they don't have to work in the fiel', they wears them spectacle; all, even the little one! Twenty-five pair of spectacle roun' that table. I has seen them; me. They is far-off cousin to the family Poisson. An M'sieur Poisson don't know no better — or if he do, he think he will be forgive because he is so poor an' 'ave so many children."

"That doesn't excuse him," Catherine insisted with the stern implacability of youth.

Miss Victorine looked across the fields. "Per'aps, Mees Catrine," she suggested gently, "it is not best to judge. Way off yonder in the country where they don't never see nobody but the peddler — an' he jes' come to cheat them — they ain't got no way of knowin' the world like we has. An' they is so poor! I reckon the family Jabart went hongry for days on top of days, to pay for them spectacle. An' Pierre Poisson what has money, an' what live in the village an' know better, he don't help his paw an' his maw none."

Catherine stood looking wonderingly up at the kindly old face; trying to adjust her point of view to this new standard which did not regard Espérance as on the outermost edge of the world, and considered the village of Bergerac as a center of enlightenment.

"But Zelinka help," Miss Victorine continued; "him an' his wife, Ottinsia Lirette. They is good people. An' Madame Poisson are not lazy. Ah no! She get up an' work in her garden before day, an' she feed her chicken, an' milk her cow, an' hoe her fiel'. My occasion of going yonder are not often, but I always buy vegetable. To go to-day was a pleasure. The road yonder are beautiful — but beautiful!"

"I'd like to see it," Catherine exclaimed with an impulse of interest in this strange, new world of which she was now a part.

Miss Victorine flushed with pleasure. "Might I tek the liberty?" she began and hesitated.

"To take me? I should be delighted to go."

Miss Victorine smiled all over her wrinkled, aquiline face. "And it meks a beautiful time now on the bayou," she said. "An' the canes! Never, never has I seen the canes grow like that! But of a height! It is to admire!"

"Is the cane better than usual?" Catherine asked, looking across the level fields that stretched to the woodland bordering Bayou Blanc. "We are so unaccustomed to planting, we feared the crop might be a failure."

"A failure!" Miss Victorine ejaculated in astonishment. "But how could that be?" In the late afternoon sunlight a gang of laborers was finishing the day's work under the supervision of a large, loose-jointed figure on horseback. "A failure!" she repeated mentally, "and with my Placide overseeing." Then she

reminded herself that everything was new to these city people, and that they must gradually learn Placide's value as they must learn the value of the various kinds of soil and of the different implements.

"We have the secret hostility of Mr. Blaise to contend against," Catherine exclaimed impetuously, little suspecting the turn Miss Victorine's thoughts had taken. "He tries to cheat us in every way. He cheated us on our mules, he takes away our laborers, we have to be on our guard at every point."

Miss Victorine looked tenderly down on the lonely, motherless girl, so pretty, so imprudent, and wondered if it would be safe to give her a word of advice. "You think him dangerous?" she asked. "Then it is bes' to be silent. You know, the one who done the wrong never forgive. No, it is not an advantage to 'ave dealing with M'sieur Tobias. But soon all will be frien'ly between Gole Mine and Espérance, hein? An' already he begin to tek interes'. I come from seein' his horse behind the Ole Buryin' Groun', an' I ask myself, 'What is he do at the Ole Buryin' Groun'? Is he pray at the grave of his ancestor? But no! Not M'sieur Tobias. He is not *dévoté*.' Then," she continued, raising her forefinger impressively, "I figure to myself it is the gas pocket he visit; an' he tie his horse to the graveyard fence so she can mek a good supper while he study the pocket. But, Mees Catrine, it is not bes' to talk about M'sieur Tobias in this parish. He hear what we thinks in the dark with the door shut. Yes, he do. But in the long, long grindin', Mees Catrine,

the head weigh more than the ears — an' Espérance have got the head, while Gole Mine possess the ears. Still, caution, *chère Mamselle*. Let it be a secret that you fear *heem* — an' the only way to keep a secret are to say nothin' — otherwise —”

Whatever additional advice she was about to give, was interrupted at this point by a sound of shouting on the other side of the bayou, and Père Ignace dashed into view, half standing in his buggy and sawing at the lines while he filled the air with objurgations.

“That Cauchemar!” Miss Victorine exclaimed. “One day she will kill Père Ignace, an' then I hope she will be satisfy.”

“I wouldn't keep such a creature,” Catherine declared. “Oh! O-h! O-h-h!” This last was a shriek from both, for Père Ignace having triumphantly reached the point opposite and perceiving the two ladies watching him, attempted to raise his hat with the whip still clenched in his hand. The all-observant Cauchemar, catching sight of the whip and mistaking the demonstration, rose suddenly upright on her hind feet and pawed the air.

“She'll smash the buggy!” cried Catherine.

“She will teep heem in the bay-you!” shrieked Miss Victorine.

“Oh! O-h-h-h!” they both screamed as the animal whirled and tried to make a dash for home. There was a hailstorm of blows, a torrent of vociferations, and bouncing at a breakneck speed, the buggy went rocking away and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

"*Mon Dieu!*" Miss Victorine sighed in relief. "Before my h-eyes I seen him dead. My hair come straight on my head. I—"

From behind a clump of coffee-weeds at the side of the road where Cauchemar had executed her most spirited antics, a small pig now slunk into sight with a conscious-smitten air.

"*Mon Dieu!*" Miss Victorine repeated. "An' now it are Tobias who aim to walk on the top of the road. I mus' chase heem, or he is los'," and forgetting in her excitement even to say her customary "*Au revoir,*" she whirled away, bouncing over the rough road and lashing her pony with the blossoming weed.

"You and Miss Victorine have been having an exciting conversation," said Fergus, slipping his hand through Catherine's arm. "Ah here comes Pidgeon at last!" as the small, round figure came in sight, perched like a monkey so far back on the mule's haunches that he seemed in danger of slipping down its tail. He was beguiling the tedium of the trip by playing ball with the package of mail; leaning far over, now this way, now that, to catch it first in one hand, then in the other. Suddenly perceiving the two figures he became as demure as a mute at a funeral and, sliding down to the ground, stood cap in hand while Fergus explained to him the need of care in handling the letters.

Ronald, standing on the gallery, watched Catherine as she approached, her hand on Fergus' arm, her head bent as she examined an address he was showing her.

One of her chief beauties, he reflected, was her perfect grace. So dainty, he thought, so exquisite, such a flowerlike girl, but with such a cruel heart! It was his calamity that, in spite of this knowledge, he continued to love her. He marveled at his own weakness.

"Nothing yet from Tom Ogers?" he asked, coming down the steps to meet them.

"Nothing," said Fergus, "but here's a letter from New Bedford. From Emily Allin, I judge. That will be a pleasure."

"Yes," said Ronald, indifferently, "it's from Emily," and walked away reading it.

He might have stopped and shared it with her, Catherine thought. She and Emily were classmates at Dobbs' Ferry, and it would have been interesting to hear of their old friends. Then it occurred to her that a letter to Ronald might not be so interesting as if it had been written to her.

"Have you the Society Notes, Fergus?" she asked.

"Oh, yes," he said, handing her the sheet. "I beg your pardon."

"I like to see what our old friends are doing," she explained.

"Of course," he agreed, and went on reading the editorial page.

Presently glancing up, she said, "Marc Sutton is at Gold Mine. They're giving a week-end house party, and," after another pause, she added in a hard tone, "I don't see why those people want to pretend any friendship for us. I don't see why that Blaise

girl called on me." It was the first time she had mentioned the incident, and she colored as she spoke of it now, knowing that Fergus must disapprove of her rudeness to Modesta. "You say Mr. Blaise seems more friendly than he did formerly; but, Fergus, I'm sure he's just as dangerous as a tiger. I told you about seeing him at the gas pocket, and Miss Victorine mentioned seeing him there again this evening. She said it very cautiously, but I'm sure she meant to put us on our guard. He means mischief. You may depend upon it; he means mischief."

XVIII

SEATED as they were, they did not see the figure that dismounted at the gate and approached them, moving as noiselessly as a cat, walking in the violets that bordered the path, still further to muffle his footsteps. When Catherine said, "I'm sure he means mischief," a soft voice with something indefinably characteristic in its intonation, replied, "But he's harmless."

Her nerves all in a quiver, Catherine sprang to her feet. "Marc Sutton!" she cried.

"Yes," said the visitor coming up the steps and taking a hand of each, "at last I had a chance to come. And I beg your pardon for overhearing your last words. I ought to have realized you couldn't see me, and spoken sooner."

Fergus now noticed that his horse was tied outside and, seated as they were, he had quite naturally approached unperceived.

Still holding Catherine's hand, Marc said, in his soft, caressing voice, "What have you been doing to make yourself lovelier than ever? I didn't believe that possible when you were my queen."

"Why, Marc!" Ronald's voice spoke from the hall door, "when did you come?"

"To Espérance? This moment. I'm over at Gold Mine for the week-end." Then, to Fergus, "I thought I could attend to that matter more satisfactorily in person than I have been able to by letter."

"Can't you stay here to-night?" Catherine asked. "We'll send Pidgeon over to Gold Mine to tell them you've been taken prisoner. I haven't seen any one from New Orleans since I left there — so you know how starved for news I must be."

"I wish I could stay," he answered with apparent sincerity, "but I must be back this evening; I'll stay to supper though if you'll let me."

When they were gathered about the table, he told them the recent gossip of the city; of how grand Belle Snively's wedding was — "the most brilliant affair —" he was going to say "for several seasons," but, remembering that that reflected on Catherine's *bal poudré* of only one year ago, he changed the wording of his sentence, and said, "the most brilliant since you left."

"Did she look pretty?" Catherine asked.

"Pretty?" he looked at her and laughed. "You ask? And when did she look pretty? She was gorgeously dressed. They say it was her grandmother's wedding gown. I never knew she had a grandmother — did you? But this was her wedding gown — 'which she wore at the President's inaugural ball,' mind you. It was a mass of lace — I don't know what kind. You'll have to ask May Burbank. I saw her up in the gallery, looking with all her eyes. Some

contrast to her own wedding. She was married in a traveling dress. Don't you go and make such a mistake, Catherine. A girl has a chance to wear a veil and orange blossoms just once in her life; and then to go and get married in a traveling dress! But the greatest joke is — but you mustn't tell I told you; say some one else did — By the way, where did you first meet Belle Snively? ”

“ Belle Snively? ” Catherine queried, astonished. “ I met her — I don't remember where I met her first. Oh, yes, I met her at that kermess we danced to raise money for the Charity Hospital. Don't you remember? She was dressed as a Polish peasant — Polish or Russian. Which was it? ”

“ Russian,” said Marc.

“ She was just as cunning as she could be in her furs,” Catherine said.

“ And fairly broiling with the heat,” Marc added.

“ But so pretty and fascinating,” Catherine insisted.

“ Oh, come now,” Marc protested. “ Fascinating, if you will, but not pretty. She never had a ghost of a claim to be pretty.”

“ Yes, she did,” Catherine insisted. “ Don't you remember her long braid of jet-black hair, reaching almost to her ankles? ”

“ Certainly I do, and I know where she rented it.”

“ Oh, Marc, I don't believe it.”

“ And that was the evening she and Angelina Horne created such a furore dancing together,” Ronald remembered.

"She and Angelina have quarreled. They quarreled the day of the wedding — too late to drop Angelina out of the wedding procession. And Belle was furious at having her," Marc went on.

"What was it about?" Catherine asked. "They were so intimate."

"Angelina accused her of something or other. By the way, Angelina has been robbed. She lost her diamond ear-rings. Those great head-lights she used to wear."

"Since the wedding?" Ronald asked.

"Before. And Modesta lost a pearl ring the last time Belle was out here."

"You don't mean to insinuate—" Catherine exclaimed.

"Heaven forbid!" Marc interrupted. "I don't insinuate anything. I was merely on the point of stating a disconnected fact."

"And what was it?" Catherine asked.

"Oh, nothing, except that Modesta lost it; but Belle smoothed it over by accusing a little maid that had come recently, and later they found the ring."

"Isn't it possible the maid had stolen it and put it back?" Catherine asked.

"Yes, it's possible," Marc replied with a soft laugh. "Wasn't the third form of supposition in Greek 'Supposition with bare possibility,' Fergus? I think the maid's having stolen it is the third form of supposition. Anyhow, the child wanted to leave and the priest was called in. I don't know why it all made such an

uproar — and if Belle took the ring — mind, I say *if* she took it, I'm sure she didn't foresee the complications that would arise from her accusing the servant."

"It wasn't one of our Espérance negroes, was it?" Fergus asked. "I'm trying to become acquainted with their characteristics so I can know whom to trust."

"'Trust'?" Marc repeated and laughed. "Well, set your mind at rest. It was a white girl they've taken out of charity. She comes from somewhere on this bayou, but not near here."

"And did Angelina recover her ear-rings?" Catherine asked.

"Yes, she hired a detective and they were found; no one knows just where. It was hushed up, but it looked awkward for Belle. The city's humming with it, and everybody's remembering things, now Belle's gone. It's screamingly funny to hear the girls talk. May'll write you all about it. By the way, Fergus, did the Smithsonian Institution buy your coin collection?"

"No."

"What became of it?"

"I don't know."

There was a moment's silence in which all remembered that Belle was with Catherine during the breaking up of the home.

"It must have been accidentally carted away with the furniture," Fergus observed. "The collection was so heavy no one person could have carried it off."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking Belle had stolen it," Marc protested with a laugh. "As you say, no one person

could have carried it off. Besides, I'm slow to suspect people. I don't believe I could ever convict a man on circumstantial evidence. His guilt might seem unquestionable; then, years later, you find he is innocent. I knew of a man who was hanged for a murder he never committed, and twenty years later, the real criminal confessed on his death bed. Now you say that Mr. Blaise means mischief — but on what do you base your assertion? ”

“ I saw him prowling around our gas pocket,” Catherine replied.

“ Is it fenced in? ”

“ No.”

“ Well, then, why couldn't he stop and look at it without trespassing? What harm was there in it? I'm not defending him; I'm asking for information.”

Catherine listened with that strange feeling of having heard all this before — that curious counterfeit of memory — which doubtless gave rise to the theory of reincarnation; and when Marc began talking of business it seemed as if she knew what was coming. He explained the plan by which Tobias Blaise was willing to pay a certain sum for the gas pocket, and another sum if he found gas.

“ If? ” said Ronald; “ he knows it's there.”

“ Yes,” Marc acknowledged, “ he knows it's there.”

“ And you saw how it burned,” Catherine added.

As Marc raised his eyes to her face, she remembered the impression their intense blackness sometimes pro-

duced upon her as if, looking at her, he did not see her. "Yes," he acknowledged again, "I have seen it burn. But in this matter, we must talk practically and not theoretically. You know it's always a risk, boring in the earth for anything. The gas is there — but can he harness it? And is it in paying quantities? And can he pipe it to his sugarhouse cheaply enough to use it for fuel? It seems to me this is a great chance for you to realize on non-productive property without taking any risk. You will excuse my speaking so frankly. If you had the money to bore, of course, that would be a different matter."

"Perhaps," Catherine began impulsively, when Ronald's eyes flashed a warning at her.

Marc saw the look and read its meaning. "They have a plan for raising the money," he thought. Then, aloud, "I think you must know that I'm not acting in Blaise's interest in this matter. I've been talking gas — not hot air —" with a humorous glance at Catherine. "I'm not trying to deceive him any more than I am you — I really have no interest in the matter outside my friendship for you, and my duty as your lawyer. I thought, considering the doubtful position of that gas pocket — so near the boundary line you can't be quite sure which side it's on — it would be a mighty lucky thing for you to get rid of it without further controversy."

"If it is on his side of the line it already belongs to him," Fergus answered quietly, "and we should not consent to his paying us for what was not ours."

"Certainly, if it were proved that it was not yours. I know you too well to suspect you'd accept money for what was not yours. But you can't be sure of that without all the expense of surveying, looking up papers, and so on. The records have not been well kept in this parish. There is one thing proves your ownership to me." He glanced at Fergus with that furtive, half-laughing expression habitual with him.

"And what is that?" his three hearers asked in a breath.

"The fact that Blaise is willing to pay for it without haggling."

"Marc," said Catherine, "why did you and he examine it before speaking to Fergus? You know that was a queer way to treat old friends."

Marc's face took on a pale, salmon tinge as he replied: "Not at all. We happened to be riding past and Blaise said, 'Don't you want to see a natural wonder?' That was all there was to it. I didn't even know at that time that it belonged to you. And mind, I'm not urging any of you to sell. I'm only saying, unless you can bore, and unless you have money to fight his claim (if he should decide to make one), it seems to me a waste to let natural resources lie idle. And money's awfully tight just now."

After supper he expressed much regret that he must hurry back to Gold Mine, adding, "I promised to come when Modesta was in Belle's party. I couldn't get out of it — and she's a nice little thing," he added as if recalled to something he had forgotten. Ronald's eyes

rested on him with a curious expression, but he said nothing.

Ananias was waiting at the foot of the steps with the horse, which loomed tall and ghostly in the half light from the lantern hanging from the saddle bow. Marc mounted stiffly and cautiously. He was not at home on horseback and held the bridle in a nervous grasp, leaning forward a little so that, unconsciously to himself, his pale, sallow face with its closely trimmed black beard and the high forehead with a black peak in the center looked like a mask from which the surface blackness of his eyes glittered like jewels.

Hat in hand, he smiled up at Catherine. "Can't we all go fishing together, one of these days?" he asked. "You know, all work and no play is bad for everybody. We'll get that handsome Cajan boy, Jacques (he pronounced it Jakes) Lirette, to pilot us. They say he knows the coast by heart."

Catherine flushed scarlet, the name had come so unexpectedly. How did he know anything of Jacques Lirette, she wondered with alarm.

"Think over the matter about the gas pocket, Fergus," Marc continued as if he had not noticed Catherine's embarrassment. "You'll be with us, tomorrow, I suppose, Ronald?" Then, with a pleasant good-night, and the promise to come soon for a fishing trip, he rode away.

The lantern swung and flickered and the three on the gallery watched it in silence. Down the long sweep of the driveway to the gate, past the clump


of shrubbery outside the fence, now hidden by thick foliage, now twinkling clearly through an opening; growing smaller and more distant until the hollow sound of hoofs on the wooden bridge, unnaturally loud in the silence of the night, told that he was crossing the bayou.

"He's dangerous," exclaimed Ronald, as the hoof beats died away. "Blaise wants to be friendly with us for several reasons; and it's to our interest to meet him half way. But that crook is trying to make trouble. I don't see why we haven't always suspected that fellow. I never noticed that retreating forehead of his before—with the hair growing down into that sharp peak in the center. He's an absolute Mephistopheles."

"How uncharitable you are!" Catherine exclaimed. But, at the same time she felt frightened at Marc Sutton's words. What had he meant to imply, she wondered.

"I suppose you think he has a winning countenance," Ronald retorted.

"I think he's homely," she acknowledged, "but I never did choose my friends for their beauty." Then, in her own mind, she wondered again how he happened to speak of Jacques; and a fear assailed her that he would couple their names together in some way if she quarreled with him. It was cowardly of her not to speak her fear to those two who had proved their love and trustworthiness by a lifetime of devotion, but she reflected that Ronald would be tempted to say, "I



told you so," if she acknowledged her dread. Instead, she said, "I can see how it may easily have happened."

"You didn't notice his expression?" Ronald inquired. He was still looking toward the bridge, and the dim light from the hall showed the haughty poise of his head and the nervous frown on his half-averted face. "Do you think," he continued in the same tone, "that any one ever looked as freakish as that if there was nothing wrong with him?"

"Fergus," she protested, "is it reasonable to turn against an old friend just because he looks queer by lantern light?"

"I think Cathie is right," Fergus interposed. "Perhaps his standards are not exactly like ours, but the great danger of living such isolated lives is that one falls into the habit of distrusting people. We exaggerate trifles and think they have a deep meaning."

"As I looked at him," Ronald continued musingly, as if speaking to himself, "I could see him with shaven head and the convict stripes around his neck. His face was made for that uniform."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, talking that way," she declared. "I know why you're so severe toward him" and she walked away.

"He makes me sick," Ronald exclaimed as Catherine left them. "He thinks he's so wonderfully deep — making eyes at the girls, and setting them all by the ears. Slandering every girl he knows. And here's Cathie, fooled by a few soft words. Girls can't see through a pane of glass."

Fergus musing abstractedly, seemed not to hear him.

"I'll wager anything," Ronald went on, "he has Espérance at his fingers' ends and knows it better than we do."

"Why do you think he would give Blaise the preference over us?" Fergus asked.

"Blaise holds cards and spades," Ronald exclaimed. "Don't you see? Blaise has the money to bore right away. And he has a daughter Marc might marry. If we hadn't lost out, he'd have tried to marry Catherine. Good heavens, Fergus!" He broke off. "Can't you induce her to have a little common sense and not listen to every adventurer and Cajan fisherman that comes along? Marc will cajole her into signing away the plantation, if you don't watch her. Jove!" he ejaculated, walking away. In a moment he returned. "If Tom comes," he said, "he'll advance the money, and with a little money, we'll be on our feet in no time. But without money — we're so helpless!"

Fergus laid his hand on Ronald's shoulder. "Go to bed," he said. "Worrying doesn't help us. Things may look brighter in the morning."

XIX

A few days after Marc Sutton's visit, bad weather set in. Day after day the rain fell and Fergus and Ronald, who heard of floods in other parts of the state, grew more and more silent and anxious. Catherine, knowing nothing of the danger of high water and not realizing how her discontent added to the burden the others were bearing, fretted daily because she could not get out of doors and because there was nothing to do within. No one imagined how keenly she missed her books and her piano. In other days, she had played charmingly, with a caressing, sympathetic touch. It was a natural gift and not the result of industry; but she now longed for music with a passionate yearning. She had been attracted to Jacques Lirette even more by the music of his voice than by his beauty, and she was tempted to have him bring his guitar and sing for her. Why shouldn't she, she asked herself. What did she care for the petty, bayou gossip? But for some reason, she did not do it.


Going into the kitchen one morning she said, "Marcelline, what do women do in the country when it rains all the time? I never thought about it before, but I wonder what Noah's wife did, shut up in the ark."

"I reckon she were right busy," Marcelline replied,

"You knows, she had plenty animules to tend. But I reckon she set an' study a heap er times what she were a-goin' to do when the rain let up. She mout er study how she were a-goin' to shoo away all them snake an' chicken hawk an' buzzard when it come time to let out her chicken an' tukkey. An' then she had her cookin' to do, an' you know men folks is right fussy about they eatin'—'specially in rainy weather when they isn't got much to do outside. An' she didn't have no one to help her, lessen her daughters-in-law whirled in an' lent a hand. An' that ain't likely."

Days passed and still the rain beat against the windows and leaked through the roof. Then one morning Catherine awoke to a sky of the deepest azure and the sunlight gilding all the landscape. The field work, hindered by the wet weather, was now resumed with double energy, and even Ananias, so long considered indispensable at the house, was pressed into service in the cane fields.

Catherine, with renewed interest, went into her rose garden which was a riot of blossoms, filled with the music of the birds and bees. It was good to be alive, she acknowledged half-grudgingly, as she breathed the perfumed air. From the garden she went to the chicken yard where she found Marcelline and Pidgeon transferring a brood of chirping little creatures and their indignant mother to one of the small enclosed spaces built for that purpose. As Catherine approached, she overheard Marcelline say, "Thank God,



the levees has held. Mr. Placide sure know how to watch them levees."

"Are there levees out here, Marcelline?" she asked.

"Sure they is levees out yeah," the old woman answered. "They's fur back, against the swamp. Effen they wasn't, we'd be like Miss Noah you was axin' 'bout, I reckon."

"I didn't know this plantation was subject to overflow," Catherine said.

"All this part er the kentry are subjec' to overflow," Marcelline replied, "but they's good levees round Espérance." Then the conversation turned to various breeds of chickens, and Catherine thought no more of the high water.

The following day, as she was again cutting roses to carry to the house, she wandered back nearly to the chicken yard. From where she was standing, she could hear Pidgeon's sweet, African voice crooning:

"When the moon run down in purple stream,
Purple stream,
When the sun refuse to shine,
When every star shall disappear,
King Jesus shall be mine,
Shall be mine."

She stood listening, and as she did so, her eyes ran with unconscious pleasure over the group of buildings which, as on every plantation, formed a complement to the main house. Largest and most important was the kitchen, connected with the back gallery by a

raised walk covered with a scuppernong arbor. Against the side of the kitchen and forming an angle with the two tall cisterns at its rear, was the milk shed where the open churn and a row of milk pans were tilted against the raised step to catch the morning sunlight. Nearer to the garden was the wash house, and back of that the chicken house, and a succession of enclosures which reached nearly to the stables. More remote were the smoke house and corn bin, bordering the pasture; then came the fields and the woods. The buildings and fences were all more or less in a state of dilapidation, but in the bright sunshine they presented an unwonted charm to Catherine's eyes.

Something cold touched her foot. Starting back, she perceived a long thread of water stealing through the grass like a snake; then another and another. She was in a labyrinth of tiny streams. What could it mean? In a sudden panic, she jumped across the ditch which was rapidly filling, and ran toward the kitchen calling, "Marcelline!"

Almost before Catherine finished speaking, the old woman understood the situation. Putting her hands distractedly to her head, she called to Pidgeon. "You run to the fiel' an' tell Mr. Fergus the levee has broke," she commanded breathlessly as he came out of the chicken house. "An come back quick ez you kin," she added. "An' tell Mr. Fergus we needs Unc' Nias." With swift steps she went from enclosure to enclosure, gathering hens and chickens into her apron and carrying them up to the loft.

"Why are you doing that?" Catherine asked in surprise.

"To save them from drownin'," Marcelline replied without pausing in her work; "we mout be all overflowed by night."

"Can I help?" Catherine asked.

"Yes, Ma'am, you kin help," Marcelline replied. "You kin empty the feed bin. We has to carry all the feed upstairs." Then, lifting her voice and rounding her hand at the side of her mouth to form a speaking trumpet, she called, "Chukey, whar is you?" But no Chukey appeared. At the first alarm, she had discreetly gone home to attend to her own affairs.

Catherine looked helplessly around for a pan, then finding a bucket, filled it to overflowing and toiled up the stairs with her heavy load.

"You kin empty it in the box in the cornder," Marcelline directed, instinctively taking command.

Again and again Catherine filled the bucket, and dragged it up the stairs until, with trembling limbs, she sank down on the lowest step unable again to lift her load.

"You better go to the house," Marcelline suggested. "You mout have to take all you clo'es outen the armoires. We don't know how high the water are goin' to rise."

"You think we'll have to live upstairs?" Catherine asked,

"We mout. We doesn't know how bad the break are; nor where 'bouts in the levees. It might be jes'

a little break what they kin stop right away, an' it mout be a reg'lar washout."

"What will happen if it's a washout?"

But Marcelline was again out of sight and Catherine could hear her dragging some heavy object across the floor. She crossed the yard, where little pools of water were already forming in the long grass, and a bevy of ducks was delightedly quacking. She was timid about being alone, and so instead of going into the empty house and beginning to pack her clothes as Marcelline had suggested, she waited on the back gallery until the old woman returned.

"What will become of us," Catherine repeated, "if there is a washout?"

"The Lawd only knows," Marcelline replied. "All I knows is this much: effen He pint the way, we is boun' to go. We kin rare an' charge all we likes, but we's boun' to keep in the road. An' effen He say fur us to go thoo the Red Sea, we mout as well haul off an' wade right in. An effen He say 'Swim!' we's boun' to swim whether we kin or not."

There was something displeasingly hortatory in this reply, and for the moment Catherine asked no more questions but followed the old woman into the bedroom where she began emptying armoires and dresser drawers. Presently, motioning toward the white velvet box which still stood under the bed, she observed, "We mout tote that upstairs, but it are mighty hefty, an' soak' with the dampness. I reckon it will bust ef we teches it."

"It can't be very heavy," Catherine replied, "but there's no use carrying it upstairs," and she walked out to the front gallery. Here a strange sight met her eyes. Across the bayou, where the fields of Espérance met those of Gold Mine, between the ridges of feathery cane, there were long, black ribbons of water.

Presently Marcelline, her arms full of parcels, looked out of the door. "That are black water," she observed; "hit are backin' up from the swamp."

"It can't be very serious," said Catherine. "They'd be doing something if it were. There isn't a soul in sight."

"I reckon they is doin' all they kin," Marcelline assured her. "Hark!" as the faint sound of a bell reached them from a distance. "That are to Gole Mine," she exclaimed; and a moment later the bell of Espérance took up the cry of alarm with its sharp, brazen clang.

And now Ananias and Pidgeon appeared, splashing through the water. As soon as they were within speaking distance, Catherine, consumed with impatience, called, "Tell me, Ananias! What is it?"

"It are a break," he answered, mopping his head with his red bandana handkerchief. "It have broke bofe sides to wonst. The one over yonder to Gole Mine are worser'n ourn. The water are risin' mighty brisk in Bayou Blanc, an' Mr. Tobias are a-bawlin' fer help. He kin outbawl a panther; him. Mr. Ronal' have went over to Gole Mine an' Mr. Fergus an' Mr.

Placide has tooken all our han's fum Espérance an' has went to our swamp."


"Of course," thought Catherine, "Ronald is helping at Gold Mine. His interests are all there. We can drown for anything he cares." She stood watching the rising water after Ananias and Pidgeon had splashed away toward the rear of the house, and not knowing the importance of stopping the break at Gold Mine, (that until it was stopped Espérance would not be safe), she thought bitterly of Ronald.

Down the bayou road came Jacques Lirette, riding like the wind. Seeing her, he dashed in at the gate and stopped his panting pony at the foot of the steps. She came part way down and stood on a level with him. "Is the water rising at Bergerac?" she asked.

"I didn' went that far," he replied. "I was over to Poisson's, an' the water haven't riz there. It's jes' here to Espérance and over yonder to Gole Mine, an' down the bayou, I reckon."

"Is there danger that we shall drown?" she asked.

"No, Mees Catrine," he answered. "No one to espérance, neither to Gole Mine. Down to the Settlement? Perhaps." His face was of a marble whiteness, but it was not the pallor of fear. He wore an expression of courage and manliness at variance with his usual boyish beauty. She noted this change, but, at the same moment, her sub-conscious mind took in the luster of the dark eyes and the sweetness of the lips that seemed made for laughter.



"I mus' go help my people," he said, "but I thought you might be skeered —"

"I am," she acknowledged, "and I'm lonely. But I always am."

He looked at her in perplexity. Why should a great lady, the owner of a plantation with all the duties and occupations that that entailed, be lonely? Yet, manifestly, she was longing for companionship. The two young faces were similar in coloring and, at the moment, bore an intangible resemblance, although his beauty was of the solitude of the bayou; hers, of generations of culture and contact with the world. Yet each asked an unspoken question: hers was a passionate seeking for companionship; his, an entreaty. "Do not make a plaything of my heart," his seemed to say.

"Are you really in danger of drowning at the Settlement?" she asked.

"It is possible," he replied.

"Oh, don't go!" she ejaculated. "Stay where you will be safe."

His startled look rebuked her. What had she meant, it asked plainly. "I mus' go help my people," he repeated then, bending toward her he extended his hand. She laid hers in it. His eyes questioned her but after an instant he released it, saying, "I'm more 'n sure Espérance will be save'."

She watched him riding away — perhaps to his death — and she flushed at the construction he might put upon her words. But she defended herself against her own accusations. Surely, she argued, he must

have known it was only because she wished to save him from danger that she had spoken so. It was not a special anxiety, more than she would have felt for anyone else. But his instantaneous recognition of her interest warned her of danger. She had acted rashly, she knew. She would never have allowed his father to take her hand — then why had she let Jacques? She refused to answer the question.

The lapping of the water against the steps recalled her to the threatening danger, and suddenly she realized that it was growing dark. Where were Fergus and Ronald, she wondered with a sharp contraction of the heart. She could hear the servants moving from room to room and as she went into the house, Marcelline met her in the hall, her arms full of bundles. The old woman looked searchingly at her, but said nothing.

“Do you think it’s necessary to move everything?” Catherine asked. “We’re not really in danger, are we?”

“We has to be ready, Miss Catrine,” Marcelline replied. “The water moun’t come into the house, an’ then agin, it mout. It are risin’. They hasn’t stop’ the breaks yit. An now, Miss Catrine, effen you is willin’, Unc’ Nias’ll go over to the quarters an’ save the things fum our cabins.”

Until that moment, it had not occurred to Catherine that their poor little possessions were in danger while they were saving hers. Remorsefully she exclaimed, “Why, Marcelline, of course! You can all go.”

"No, Ma'am," Marcelline answered calmly, "we ain't er gwine ter do like Chukey have did. I is gwine ter stay, an' so are Pidgeon. He kin keep on pilin' them things in the upstairs hall." With quiet efficiency, she moved about, lighting the lamps, giving a touch here and a touch there, and making the bleak rooms as habitable as possible. "An' now we mus' git dinner ready," she finally said, "'case them gentlemens is gwine be hongry when they gits back. I reckon they's never wukked as much in they hull lives as they has this day."

The water was rippling against the back steps and the sides of the raised walk that led from the back gallery to the kitchen, but the sky was clear and the stars shone with piercing brightness. Catherine, standing in the dining-room door shuddered as the night wind came whispering through the trees. She was afraid to stay alone, except for Pidgeon who was groping around in the semi-darkness, stumbling over obstructions and making strange noises as he dragged things about. After hesitating a moment, she followed Marcelline to the kitchen where, seated on a three-legged stool before the fire, she watched her while she moved about the great, old-fashioned kitchen, handling various weird-looking utensils. Catherine thought of a prophetess at her incantations. But there was nothing witch-like in Marcelline's appearance. She was a tall, stately negress with a calm, gentle expression of countenance. A restful person who gave one that indefinable impression of power, of order and comfort

which seemed the special gift of the well-trained plantation servant.

After a long silence, Catherine said, "Did you ever see people have as hard times as we have?"

"Harder! A heap harder!" the old woman replied emphatically. "Onct, in Lafourche, they was sech high water, hit stood fifteen feet deep over the talles' cane. They sent out relief boats fer the poor trash like them people down to the Settlement." She paused and looked at her young mistress. "Them pore critters doesn't never have no comfort like you has it. They best times is wusser'n you wust times. An' they doesn't know how ter take keer on theyselves, no times."

Catherine winced. Was there any special meaning in Marcelline's words? Was she warning her not to cross over into a life of which she was ignorant? She reddened in the firelight and pushed her stool back into the shadow.

"But our Madam were quality," Marcelline went on. "She were quality, an' she were fum the kentry, an' she knowed how to take keer on herself, 'thout no relief boat. She fish outen the winder; an' the Marster, he tu'n all the live stock loose an' let them save theyselves. An' all the niggers went away 'case they had to go to git grub. An' the Marster, he tuk an' pull the boards fum the cabins in the quarters, an' he knock down the kitchen chimbley, an' he lay them bricks roun' the aidges er the rooms, an' he lay them

boards on ter the bricks fer to make floors top er the water, an' he histed the furnitures —"

"How long did it last?" Catherine interrupted.

"Six weeks er less," the old woman answered absently, bending to shovel fresh coals from the front of the fireplace and heap the glowing mass on top of the iron Dutch oven in which the meat was roasting, "hit mout er ben more, er —"

"Oh, Aunt Marcelline!" Catherine wailed, unconsciously using, for the first time, the endearing title familiar to every southern-bred child, "it might happen to us. Every bad thing that can happen, happens to us. Oh, I wish to heaven Fergus and Ronald would come! Why don't they come!"

Marcelline stood upright, majestic in her tone and manner as she looked down on her young mistress and said gently: "You is yong, Miss Catrine, an' it take a long time to learn patience. My maw were sol' away fum her ole man an' her chillen, up yonder in Fuginniah, but she use' to say to us pickaninnies what was bo'n after she come yeah —'case me an' my sisters an' my twin brother —"

"You had a twin brother?" Catherine interrupted, nervously impatient of this prolixity.

"Yas'm, I were a twin, an' we-alls was bo'n down yeah,— nigh to Malabar — an' my maw use' to say to we-alls: 'Patience! Patience, chilluns. Effen you doesn't have patience, you has to have impatience, an' that are wuss.'"

Pidgeon's voice, hallooing from the back gallery, now made itself heard. There was no mistaking the agitation in his tones: "I didn't went to do it, Miss Catrine. I scacely teched it, an' it went an' busted of itself."

"What you hollerin' that-a-way fer?" Marcelline demanded sternly from the kitchen door.

"Come quick, Miss Marcelline," he wailed. "The box in under the baid have busted, an' the things is runnin' around everywhere."

"What in the world is the matter?" Catherine demanded, following Marcelline into the house. Led by the sound of Pidgeon's passionate reiteration of, "I didn't went to do it," she made her way to the bedroom where, at the foot of the bed, she beheld the remains of the white velvet box crushed into splinters, and half hidden under a mass of copper coins.

"The coin collection!" she cried, dropping on her knees and burying her hands in the metal. What might this not mean to them? The Smithsonian Institution had at one time wished to buy it. Perhaps it would redeem them from their bondage.

When, at midnight, Fergus came in with the good news that the crevasse in the swamp levee had been stopped, Catherine met him with the almost unbelievable statement that his coin collection was found.

XX

AS Catherine looked back on that first summer in the country, it seemed to have been nothing but one long, continuous rain, which soaked the ground and kept her a solitary prisoner in the great, empty, echoing house; wandering drearily from room to room and looking out of streaming windows at a landscape where not a living creature was moving. Day after day and all day long, Fergus and Ronald were absent, coming home late, with boots and clothing soaked and splashed with mud. When she asked what they had been doing, they usually answered that they were watching the levees to prevent another crevasse. There was no use trying to make comfortable a house where buckets and tubs stood in every room to catch the water that dripped through the broken roof, and where the cracked walls looked leprous in their dampness with streams of moisture trickling downward. Her shoes mildewed in the armoire; her clothing — in fact, everything she touched — seemed blue with mould. When she once tried to sew, in despair of any other occupation, her rusted needle broke in her hand. Finally she reached the limit of her endurance when, opening a bureau drawer, she found a snake coiled on her clothing.

Marcelline came running at her shrieks. "Is you hurt, Miss Catrine?" she cried.

Catherine, cowering back against the wall, pointed with shaking finger. "A snake, Marcelline!" she gasped.

"Oh, yes, honey," Marcelline said, trying to comfort her, "sometimes they does creep into hidin' places like that, when they's wet weather."

"They might get into my bed," Catherine cried, horror-struck.

"I never year tell er they gettin' into folkses beds," Marcelline assured her, opening the window and adroitly emptying the contents of the drawer on to the ground. "I'll leave you clo'es layin' a spell," she said, "the rain'll do 'em good."

"I don't want ever, ever to wear those things again — after a snake has lain on them," she declared.

"'Twant nothin' but a chicken snake," Marcelline said soothingly; "'Twant no pison snake."

"It might have bitten me!" she cried.

"I reckon it would, effen you'd a teched it. But it wouldn't a pisoned you — no more'n a hawg, er a geese. Anything what bites mout pison you a little. 'Tain't good to be bited by animules; ner by nothin'."

"It would have killed me," Catherine cried shudderingly. "I'd have died if a snake had bitten me — any kind of a snake — and a great serpent like that."

At supper she burst into a flood of lamentations at having to live in a place where they were subject to such frightful experiences. "Who would ever have

believed such things would happen to us? ” she cried. “ Can’t we give it up? It’s too terrible out here.”

“ What should you advise us to do? ” Ronald asked. He was wondering what her underlying thought really was. How could she fail to know that this was a life and death struggle? That she and Fergus must not give up the fight? He — Ronald — could desert them if he chose; but they were as fatally, inevitably bound as if this were the raft to which they must cling. So he was serious in asking the question which she thought sarcastic.

“ Is it worth all this struggle, Fergus? ” she asked. “ Couldn’t we begin boring for oil or gas or whatever is there, and then, when Mr. Ogers comes, get the money to finish — and then go back to the city? ”

“ No, dear,” Fergus answered wearily. “ The very life of the people out here depends on the success of the planters. But even if we cared nothing for them, the existence of gas or oil (in paying quantities) is so doubtful and the problem of boring in this sandy soil is so difficult, it would take a great deal more money than we could possibly command. At present, it looks as if we should have good prices for our sugar. There is a scarcity in other parts of the world, and further, the government needs the tariff for revenue, so I think —”

“ But Mr. Ogers is so rich,” she interrupted. “ And he was such a friend of Ronald’s. I know he’ll be interested when he sees the gas pocket. And think of the fortunes made in other places.”

"He isn't coming," Ronald said as she paused in her appeal. "He has changed his mind."

Her white face grew visibly whiter. "So that has failed us too," she said in a scarcely audible voice.

Looking at her with a passionate pity, Ronald would have given anything to take back his words. Why had he spoken so impulsively! "I mean," he began, "we can't rely on outside help. What we have, we must get for ourselves —"

"I see," she replied, looking down at her plate. "I understand."

"We're not going to starve," he went on, feeling that she thought him unsympathetic and that she blamed him, perhaps, for this fresh disappointment. "I'm sorry Ogers changed his mind, but you know he's in such demand everywhere that one can never count on him. It takes some strong inducement to lure him away from his habitual haunts."

"You thought he was coming, didn't you?" she asked still looking down.

"Yes, he's fond of fishing and I thought he might enjoy a trip to Baratara Bay." He wished he could justify himself in her eyes. It hurt and shocked him to have her feel that he was wounding her wantonly. For a moment, he wished she knew what a sacrifice he was making for her sake and Fergus's in staying in the country. Then he put the thought from him.

In the days that followed, she fell into a fathomless despair that neither Fergus nor Ronald fully realized. They were in the midst of activities that took every

ounce of strength; Ronald was buoyed up by the hope of helping Fergus on to his feet, and of getting the plantation into a really prosperous condition.

Fergus had the all-absorbing, entrancing recreation of cataloguing his coins anew. It was immaterial to him that the gold and silver pieces had all been picked out and nothing but copper remained. The pecuniary value of the collection was of minor importance; that he could no longer hope to realize a large amount from its sale was, perhaps, an unacknowledged relief, as he need not feel it his duty to part with it, but could indulge himself in the pleasure of sorting and tabulating it with a clear conscience.

Catherine alone, without occupation, was listlessly watching the endless succession of days and nights, hoping for nothing better than a bare existence, and a prolongation of life.

It is true, there were occasional intervals of clear weather when the sun shone hot, the wet earth steamed, and clouds of insects filled the air with their humming; when her garden blossomed riotously, the birds sang their thanksgiving that the rain was past, and Catherine ventured out into the light of day; but these intervals were so rare that she remembered the season, ever afterward, as one of uninterrupted imprisonment.

No one but so skilled a planter as Placide Chauvin could have wrested success from that unpropitious season. But he knew just where and how to save the laborers and the mules, and how to place them to the greatest advantage; and when, at last, with early au-

tumn, the clouds rolled away and there was continuous clear weather, he could show a good stand of cane as the result of the long-continued battle. Every one but Catherine felt an immeasurable sense of relief; she, alone, remained indifferently aloof, not considering the reward sufficient to repay one for the effort. The mere prolongation of the struggle, as she considered it, seemed to her a misfortune rather than a blessing.

When, at last, the grinding was fairly under way, she used sometimes to stand on her gallery and watch the cutters in the neighboring field. The broad knives, wielded by skilful hands, flashed in the sunlight as they stripped the leaves from the stalk, now on this side, now on that. With one motion, they swept off the plummy top; with another, they cut the stalk a few inches above the ground and tossed it on to the ever-growing heaps that marked their progress. The carts drawn by mules, went creeping along, loaded with stalks to be emptied in the cane shed. From the smoke-stacks of the sugar house a cloud of steam floated into the deep blue sky, and when the breeze came from that direction, it brought a faint perfume and the musical, deep-toned humming of the sap boiling in the great kettles.

It was especially at night that the cheerful activity was apparent and one evening, lingering after Ronald had gone, Fergus asked her if she wouldn't enjoy going over and watching the grinding.

"It is really picturesque, you know," he urged, anx-

ious to rouse her from her silence and melancholy; "come and look on for a while."

Listlessly she acquiesced, wrapping herself in a shawl and tying a faded scarf about her head.

"Wrap yourself up warmly," he said. "It's cold, you know — perfect sugar weather."

"I'm warm," she answered laconically.

As they crossed the bridge and approached the sugar house, the lights sparkled frostily and the air was heavy with the sweetness of the sugary sap oozing from the pile of bagasse (as the crushed refuse of the cane is called), which lay in a heap at one side of the building.

"You know, Cathie," he explained, "we make what is called open kettle sugar. It's the old, wasteful method, but perhaps another year we may be able to improve our mill somewhat. The utmost we hope for this year is to have a little margin left after we have paid George Burbank the money he lent us. He mustn't suffer for his generosity."

"Yes," she replied, in the words which had become almost stereotyped with her, "I know; I believe I understand the situation."

"There are some advantages too," he added, smiling affectionately at her. "It's only from the open kettle sugar we can get the *sirop de batterie*, you know, and the *cuite*. And this kind of sugar makes the only perfect pralines. Have Marcelline make you some, and have her drop them on corn shucks in the old way."

She smiled faintly, thinking how strange it was that he could imagine she would be diverted like a child with pralines; yet, because she understood his motive, she wished to seem appreciative.

As they entered the rickety old building with its whitewashed walls, and beams and rafters dripping moisture, they were enveloped in the warm, honeyed atmosphere. Through the steam, she saw figures moving. Everywhere was motion; great wheels and bands and arms of machinery, thumping and jarring until the old walls trembled. In the distance she saw the row of sugar kettles, and beside them, the men who were tending the boiling sap. Stripped to the waist, they would have looked like bronze statues but for the swaying motion with which they wielded their long paddles, skimming, skimming, skimming the kettles in time to a song they were singing.

As Fergus led her along, she saw the furnaces where fires were roaring, and as she looked, one of the firemen opened the door and the flames leaped out toward him, showing his dark figure in high relief against the fiery background.

The cold air, blowing in at an open window, tossed the wreaths of steam upward into the roof, and as she stood looking out into the night, an automobile horn sounded nearby, and a moment later the great car from Gold Mine swept around the corner of the building.

She did not know that this visit was as complete a surprise to Ronald as it was to her, and when she saw

him go out to meet the Blaises, her heart hardened with a totally unreasonable anger. He brought them into the building welcoming them cordially and showing them around as if this had been a previous arrangement. Catherine, wishing to escape notice, shrank back into the shadows. She had an impulse to take the worn scarf from her head, then, with scorn, she refrained from doing so, thinking it more appropriate to the place than the Blaises' costly furs and rich costumes.

"Don't you think we can slip away, Fergus?" she whispered.

"No," he answered in a low tone, "they see us," and he stepped forward, courteously greeting and making them welcome.

Catherine followed, but with a freezing hauteur that made both Fergus and Ronald sorry for their guests.

Mrs. Blaise, her diamond ear-rings flashing in the lamp light, smiled nervously, showing a gold tooth as she did so. Modesta, exquisite in a tailored gown — the very last expression of fashion, — exclaimed in a thin, high-pitched, nasal voice, over "this cunning little sugar house" the while she scrutinized Catherine's shabby garments. Mr. Blaise alone was perfectly self-possessed in spite of his soiled clothing and rusty boots. He had come to see the sugar house and he didn't care how haughty Catherine chose to be, especially as he had very definite plans as to how he would eventually subdue her pride. His pale eyes, set close together, were as alert as those of a lynx, darting everywhere

and comprehending what he saw far better than either Fergus or Ronald.

"You know, Miss Maine," Mrs. Blaise said after the first greeting, "Modesta and myself wanted so much to see this queer old way of making sugar."

"Oh, Mama!" Modesta interrupted, "you know yourself it was Dad made you and I come. I said I was afraid that—"

"Yes, that's so," Mrs. Blaise agreed, "he kep' sayin' to Modesta and I 'Why don't you-all go over and see Maine's sugar house? There ain't no more open kettle sugar houses in this parish.'"

"Is it different from others?" Catherine asked.

"Different!" Mrs. Blaise exclaimed. "Gracious, yes! You must come over to Gold Mine and see ours."

"Thank you," Fergus interposed hastily, foreseeing a rebuff from Catherine, "we shall take pleasure in coming. I am interested to see the difference. As you know, we have everything to learn." His manner was so frankly kind it formed the most striking contrast to Catherine's.

Ananias approached with a dipper of warm sap. "Will you taste it, Miss Catrine?" he asked.

She offered it to Mrs. Blaise then to Modesta saying, "I suppose it is no novelty to you. Are you fond of it?"

"Heavens, no!" Modesta replied with an affected shudder. "I never tasted it; but you know I've been out here so little. Away at school so long, and then in the city, I don't know anything about the—"

"Why, Destie," her mother began, but was silenced by a glance from the daughter's keen, gray eyes.

Fergus, meantime, at Mr. Blaise's request, was showing him about, and asking him questions. "I am anxious to learn," he explained, and Mr. Blaise, peering, stooping, fingering, tasting, replied, "I reckon so."

The others, following along the narrow paths between the machinery, listened to the explanations of Ronald who was wishing sincerely that either Catherine or the Blaises had stayed at home.

"I simply haven't any head for these sort of things," Modesta observed, watching Catherine out of the corner of her eyes. It was one of the triumphs of her life that she should be here talking to Catherine Maine whose head was tied up in an old scarf and her shoulders wrapped in a shawl bought from the peddler's cart. Catherine herself, was fully alive to the situation, and, consequently, all the more icy in manner.

"Dad is too funny," Modesta tittered as she caught sight of her father crawling from some dark recess which he had been exploring. "He's so crazy about planting and about the improvements between the old way of making sugar and the new. He wants to teach me, but I can't bother about all those sort of things." She smiled archly at Ronald, her light, sparkling eyes brilliant in the lamp light.

"Probably it isn't necessary," he observed, "but it's wise to prepare —"

"Oh, I know what you're going to say," she interrupted, "but I haven't time to think about such

things." Then, turning to Catherine, "I suppose you're a regular planter, Miss Maine. I expect you know just what all those awful looking machines are for."

"No," said Catherine, "it is the first time I have been here."

"Miss Maine," said Mr. Blaise, "this is mighty interesting. I'm glad Destie coaxed us to come over this evening. It's been a bad season, Miss Maine, and they tell me you're discouraged sometimes and feel homesick. I don't blame you, Miss Maine. But your brother tells me he counts on fighting it through. Hope he can. Us planters have got to stand by each other. With them politicians up yonder in Washington, trying to down the tariff; and with high water and low prices, if I was a city man, I wouldn't take up planting. No, sir! I'd stick to the city. But I don't blame you for wanting to make *Espérance* pay. But you ain't been out here long enough to know what a fight it is. First there was the bounty, and we all goes ahead and makes improvements on the strength of that, and we runs into debt, and when they takes off the bounty and puts on a low tariff — there we are. And one day it's a promise of big prices, and then comes some politician that wants to get ahead and knows free trade is popular, and he says, 'Let them sugar planters wiggle out the best way they can. No use boosting a pauper industry. Give the poor man a free breakfas' table,' and then —"

"Oh, Dad," Modesta interrupted, manifestly

ashamed of her father, "Miss Maine don't care for all that politics." Then, to Catherine, "I don't hear another thing from morning to night. Dad's so interested. When Marc's here, I almost go crazy with their talk about free trade and tariff and all those kind of things. Marc says that all we need is to stand together — the planters I mean — and send a smart man to Washington to look after our interests. I'm sure they're going to elect him senator; don't you think so?"

"I don't know," Catherine answered indifferently. "I'm not nearly so well informed as you, Miss Blaise. These things are new to me."

"Oh, but you know all about them — a thousand times more than I do," Modesta insisted, "because it's really Ronald that has told me nearly everything I know."

"Marc" and "Ronald" Catherine commented inwardly and felt the shaft Modesta had aimed at her in parading her intimacy.

"We're bound to elect him," said Mr. Blaise. "If us planters don't send him to Washington, we ain't got a chance to get on our feet," and he spat impressively.

Catherine, Fergus and Ronald stood watching the lights of the automobile as it went gliding through the night on its way to Gold Mine.

"That was kindly meant," Fergus said. "You'll go with me to see their sugar house, won't you Cathie?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," she replied, "but I don't see why you think that was kindly meant. Didn't

you notice how that man pried into every nook and corner? And he's a planter, born and bred. He isn't like us —"

"I don't think he meant any harm, Catherine," Ronald expostulated. "He's an ardent planter, and —"

"And you're an ardent advocate," she replied. "And if you wish to play into his hands there can be only one explanation of your blindness."

Ronald, who had been nettled by her conduct toward their guests during the whole evening, boiled over at her words. "The incredible folly of insulting our most influential neighbors!" he exclaimed and walked away.

"Don't ask me to go, Fergus," she cried while Ronald was still within hearing. "It's bad enough that such people are in our parish. I won't know them. People that say 'ain't' and murder the king's English at every breath. I'd rather talk with Ananias who makes no preten —"

"Or with Jacques Lirette," Ronald said over his shoulder as he turned to go into the sugar house.

For a moment she was speechless with anger, then, feeling sure that Ronald was still within hearing, she repeated in a shaking voice, "I won't know them. It may be to Ronald's interest to know them. It isn't to mine." She spoke thoughtlessly, not realizing the poisonous wound she was inflicting, but Ronald, who had heard every word, believed that she was deliberately insulting; and Fergus, the least imaginative of

the three, who shrank from controversy as from a physical hurt, determined not to reopen the subject. If she had made up her mind not to know them, he would not insist.

At last the season drew toward its close. All the cheerful noise and bustle about the sugar house, the sparkling lights at night, the hum of the boiling sap in the great kettles, the singing of the workers in the cane shed, the long lines of carts bringing their loads of cane from the fields, and the joyous stir of the rolling season would soon be ended, and then would come the long months of stagnation and silence for Catherine. On the day before Christmas, she stood on the side gallery looking at the brown fields so recently covered with sugar cane. At her right, Chukey's husband, Abimelech, with two or three others, was tending the long, low fires that ran along the furrows, now smoldering where there was little fuel, now flaring into brightness where they met a mound of the withered cane husks. A veil of smoke fluttered along the path of flame, and through it she saw the solemn gray of the moss-shrouded forest, brightened, here and there, by a vivid green tree flaunting its scarlet berries. Above the forest, an eagle was flying and she watched it until it disappeared in the distance. Near at hand she heard the kildeers calling in silvery tones. They ran swiftly by her, with a motion suggestive of their voices; keen and rapid, half bold, half timid. The air was so still that the barking of a dog in the quarters, the lowing

of a calf wandering in the woods back of the stable, the flaf, flaf, flaf of a motor boat far up the bayou, reached her with strange distinctness.

And now another sound broke upon her ear: a sound of voices of men and women singing in unison, and in the distance, she saw a crowd approaching. As they came nearer, following the road that crossed the field, Abimelech and his fellows left their work and joined the others who, according to immemorial custom, were bringing in the last load. On their shoulders, they carried Placide Chauvin, whom they regarded as the true master of Espérance.

Silently, she watched the wild, fantastic procession, amazed and half frightened that such contrasts should have come into her life.

XXI

THE transition of the seasons in the south is not clearly defined. They melt from one into the other without marked change, and so it was a surprise to Catherine when she discovered the white wisteria which covered the side gallery, carpeting the ground with its petals. The fruit trees awoke from their slumber and decked themselves with flowers; the air was redolent with the perfume of orange blossoms, and the ditch banks were covered with pink and white primroses. Spring had come. The sun shone warm and ever warmer, the birds sang more and more triumphantly, and then, before Catherine realized it, summer was there.

She was sitting on the shady gallery one morning when Fergus joined her. "Just think," he said, "this is June. And see how the cane is growing." Seating himself beside her, he took from his pocket a long, narrow envelope of a delicate rose color and, forestalling her probable objections, said, "I know you don't like the people of Gold Mine, but I think I shall accept this. I think it would be wise. And my going won't annoy you, will it Cathie?"

"Why, no," she answered, holding out her hand for the invitation. "I don't want to be thrown with them,

but if, for business reasons it seems best for you to go, of course, you must do what is necessary."

"And shall I accept for us both?" he asked, looking wistfully at her. She knew he wished she would accept personally and be gracious toward those people who were so eager to be intimate with her, but the utmost she could force herself to say was, "Certainly. Accept for us both, and then you won't feel hurt if I don't go, shall you?"

"I think it would be well to go if you can make up your mind to do it," he answered.

"Ronald has been talking to him about the way I treat them," she thought, but did not utter her suspicions. Instead, she opened the perfumed missive and read:

MR. AND MRS. TOBIAS BLAISE

MISS BLAISE

request the pleasure of your company at
a dance Friday, June the fourteenth at
eight of the clock

R.S.V.P.

"Accept it if you like," she said and handed it back without other comment.

The fourteenth of June was ushered in by a tremendous uproar on the other side of the bayou. The dogs of war seemed to have broken loose. Miss Delicia, the reserved and haughty Miss Delicia, the Mrs. Grundy of the bayou, walked out to her gate with a gun on

her shoulder, aimed at some invisible object in the air, and fired.

Miss Victorine, from her gate, fired an answer. From up and down the bayou came distant reports and in every direction puffs of white smoke dotted the landscape.

"What on earth is the matter?" Catherine asked, turning from the window as Marcelline entered with the morning coffee. Early as it was, Catherine was fully dressed, and Marcelline perceived by her pallor that she was greatly alarmed by these warlike demonstrations. "What is the matter?" she repeated, taking the cup of black coffee with a trembling hand. "Miss Delicia and Miss Victorine seem to be trying to kill each other."

"They is jus' scarin' away the devil," Marcelline answered reassuringly.

A fresh volley burst from a lugger as it passed the gate of Espérance.

"Mercy!" Catherine ejaculated, "has a feud broken out? Are people angry at us about anything?"

"No, Ma'am," Marcelline assured her soothingly; "hit's jes' like I tells you; they's scarin' the devil."

"What do you mean by 'scaring the devil'?" Catherine asked tremulously as thunderous reports came from somewhere in the quarters. "I wish Mr. Fergus and Mr. Ronald wouldn't go across the bayou to-day—but I know they will."

"In cose they will, Miss Catrine," said Marcelline. "'Twouldn't be fittin' fer the Marster to stay in on

the Fête-Dieu." (Corpus Christi Day.) "Eve'ybody scare the devil on that day. I reckon Miss Aggie Blaise are a-firin' to beat the band. She wouldn't let this day go by fer nothin' 'thout scarin' the devil. They couldn't scare him las' year 'case it were rainin', so they has to make up this year."

"That will spoil her reception to-night," Catherine said, secretly thinking what a relief it would be not to feel that she ought to attend that function.

"No, Ma'am," Marcelline repeated, "that ain't goin' to spile nothin'. Everybody round yeah scare away the devil; an' I reckon it'll all be over by to-night, they's firin' so brisk. They powder'll all be gone."

Bang, bang, from across the bayou, and bang, bang, from behind the stable. The dimple in Marcelline's cheek revealed itself in a discreet smile of amusement as Catherine, setting down her cup and exclaiming, "I don't like that at all," left the room.

As she approached the chicken yard, the squealing of pigs and bellowing of cattle assured her that the animals didn't like it either. Ananias, who was feeding the chickens, looked at her as she entered the yard, and there was something in his expression that attracted her attention. She regarded him searchingly. Certainly, she thought, he looked guilty, but why, she could not discover until, following his self-conscious glances, she discovered some chickens in a little enclosure apart from the others.

"Where did they come from?" she demanded picking up one of the downy balls.

He laughed in a deprecating falsetto and made no reply.

"Aren't they Rhode Island Reds?" she asked.

"They suttinly is," he replied, scratching his head and looking beyond her. Turning, she discovered Fergus watching her with a gratified smile.

"Are they what you wanted?" he asked.

"Wanted!" she exclaimed, "I've simply longed for some ever since I knew there were such things in the world. Where did they come from?"

"I learned they could be had from Bergerac, and the peddler brought them this morning." He stood beside her, smiling and stroking the chirping atom with the tip of one finger.

There came a piercing toot, toot, from the bayou, followed by a fresh outbreak of firing, and turning they saw an unfamiliar sight: a gasoline launch before the gate of Espérance. An instant later a young man came up the bank and, at the same moment, Ronald dashed out of the house and down the path to meet him. There could be no doubt of it, this was the long-hoped-for, long-delayed Tom Ogers.

With an exclamation of pleasure, Fergus went forward and Catherine, handing the chicken to Ananias, followed. In the short distance between the gate of the chicken yard and the group at the front steps, she saw that the stranger was of middle height, stout, blond, slightly bald, with white teeth and a pleasant smile. Faultlessly dressed, and with an air of perfect ease, he was, unmistakably, a man of the world. "Our sort,"

she thought, and her heart beat quick with a new interest and pleasure. They turned toward her as she approached, and he never forgot the impression she made upon him; her slender form, her small head haughtily poised, her dark hair disordered by the breeze and framing the pale oval of her aristocratic young face.

"How good of you," she said, extending her slender hand in welcome, "how good of you to come way out here into the wilderness to see us."

"What a pleasure I am giving myself!" he replied. How exquisitely he was groomed, and what a contrast his clothes were to the shabby, threadbare garments of Fergus and Ronald!

A man came up the path carrying a trunk on his shoulder and followed by a dark, aquiline gentleman whom Catherine recognized after a moment's bewilderment as the valet of their guest. "You see," said Mr. Ogers, "I have taken you at your word and am here, bag and baggage."

"You couldn't please us better," Fergus assured him in his quiet, pleasant manner. "We all camp out after a fashion, you know, but as far as space is concerned, there's plenty of it, and we can put you up as long as you can stay."

In a little flurry of excitement, Catherine went to the kitchen to order an omelet. "We must try to find something nice for him," she explained, knitting her brows thoughtfully and adding, "I don't know how we'll manage."

As he entered the dining-room a half hour later, she felt sure, although his eyes did not wander, that he took in all the details of cracked walls, curtainless windows, bare floor; and she felt a homesick longing for the dainty breakfast room of other days, while that unworthy sense of humiliation over merely material things that we all experience at times, crept over her.

"I fear we have kept you waiting," he said as he seated himself. "Ronald and I had so much to talk over; of things past, present and things to come."

She noticed that he left his plate almost untouched, but he sipped his coffee with the air of a connoisseur, observing, "Southern cooks make the best coffee in the world. Even the Turkish doesn't equal it, to my mind, and the French is far inferior. My man has learned to make both in the course of our travels, and he must learn this." Then, speaking to Ronald, "Isn't it five years since I saw you?"

"Just about, I think," Ronald replied. "Let me see; this is the fourteenth of June. It was on the fourth of July, five years ago, that we met by accident at the *Café de la Paix*. You remember, don't you?"

"Yes, I was thinking it was five years. You've changed a good deal in looks since then." He offered his gold cigarette case to Fergus and then to Ronald, with a smiling, "Will you permit us?" to Catherine, and adding, "Or will you join us?"

"Thank you," she said, "I don't smoke — although I ought to. Women in the country have so few enjoyments, they ought to snatch at every possible diversion.

I believe I'll acquire the habit of smoking a corn cob pipe."

"Don't," he said. "I'm sorry women have taken to smoking as they do. Their lips were not made to hold cigarettes. You used not to smoke, Ronald. That's another change."

"I don't smoke a great deal," Ronald protested. "How have I changed otherwise?"

Mr. Ogers' eyes ran over his figure before he answered, "You're older, for one thing."

"Naturally," Ronald replied. "The clock hasn't stood still during these years. I suppose I have aged more than I realize."

"I dare say," Mr. Ogers agreed, "and shall you feel hurt if I say you have lost a little of the fatal gift?"

Catherine glanced from one to the other. The sunlight was touching Ronald's crisp, thick, blond hair and lighting up his sunburned face which showed a blush in its healthy glow, contrasting strangely with the grayish pallor of the other man. His keen, dark gray eyes, full of vivid interest, were fixed questioningly on the weary, lusterless ones of their guest, and the firm, strong mouth had a certain grimness in strange opposition to the smiling, sensual lips of the other.

"You have matured surprisingly," said Mr. Ogers, again glancing (perhaps with envy) at the firmly knit figure, tall and strong and so well fitted to bear the burdens of life; whereas his own shoulders had taken on a certain softness and lack of contour.

Catherine felt a rush of pride in Ronald's size and

strength. He looked years younger than his former school mate.

"You know," said Mr. Ogers, turning to Catherine and totally unsuspecting of the contrast she was drawing, "when he came to Worcester, with his curly blond hair and pink cheeks, we mistook him for a wax doll. We decided to shave off his halo and I volunteered to act as barber. I'll never forget it," (turning to Ronald). "I can see you yet, standing gripping the back of your chair till the ends of your fingers were white, your whole figure keyed up to spring, as I headed the procession that went into your room."

"I was frightened to death," Ronald acknowledged.

"You know," Mr. Ogers said to the others, "he was large and strong even then, and I didn't like the look of him at all. I'd have backed out if I could, but the others were pushing me forward so there was nothing for it but to carry out the program, and I said, 'Good evening my son; what is your name?' Before the words were fairly out of my mouth, he said, 'Good evening, father, my name is Nebuchadnezzar,' and he whirled that chair around and struck me — I have that scar yet Ronald," he broke off with a laugh. "Queer, isn't it, how boys love to fight?"

"Mr. Ogers," Catherine began.

He stopped her with a gesture of his plump, carefully-manicured hand. "Surely," he said, "you are not going to call me 'Mr. Ogers.' I am 'Tom,' and you will permit me to call you 'Catherine,' won't you? You have always been Catherine to me, ever since

Ronald used to show me your letters and tell me of your cunning, little-girl ways. What were you about to say when I interrupted you? ”

“ I was going to tell you of a reception that is to take place to-night on a neighboring plantation. I think it might amuse you to attend.”

“ Certainly,” he replied, taking out his handkerchief and wiping the perspiration from his face. “ It would amuse me immensely. Ronald was speaking of it and said it would be permissible for me to go without a personal invitation. What is the name of the girl? Piety? ”

“ Modesta,” Ronald corrected.

“ Oh, yes; Modesta! Modesta! ” Mr. Ogers repeated. “ I must say it over and over to myself, or I shall surely call her Piety. When I get a wrong impression I find I can’t get rid of it. I knew it was some moral quality she represented, and I keep thinking it’s something religious. It’s always interesting to see the natives in their own environment,” Tom continued after a brief pause, “ and I understand this Piety — there! ” with a laugh, “ I said it again! I’m doomed to call her the wrong virtue; Modesty I meant. I hear she is quite a country belle.”

“ Oh, decidedly so! ” Catherine exclaimed with heightened color and a teasing glance at Ronald. “ You must certainly see her.”

“ I wouldn’t miss it for anything,” Tom replied, smiling at her and thinking to himself, “ She really is charmingly pretty. Her beauty grows on one.”

"But I haven't anything to wear," she said with a little, tragic gesture; "I shall disgrace you all."

"You have your queen dress, haven't you?" Fergus asked, with masculine ignorance of women's clothes.

Catherine broke into a laugh as sweet and ringing as a child's. "How amazed every one would be if I should appear in that," she exclaimed. "Why, Fergus dear, it's made to wear with a mantle and it's covered with lace and jewels. I should outshine Miss Piety herself," and she smiled mischievously at Ronald.

"She's jealous," Tom inwardly commented. Aloud, he said, "You'll put it on for me to see, won't you?"

"Some day," she replied, "but not to-day. Oh, how scandalized every one would be at me!" and she raised her slender hands in dramatic horror.

"Exquisite hands," he reflected. "She's vain of them, but she has a right to be," and the smiling look he gave her conveyed an unspoken compliment. "She really is beautiful," he thought. "Glorious eyes! I'm glad I came."

Ronald read the expression on Tom's face, and seeing the animation and pleasure on hers, thought, "The game has begun."

XXII

AT last Catherine was at Gold Mine. As Modesta talked with her, interlarding her conversation with many references to Catherine's former friends in the city, mentioning them as her own intimates, her sparkling eyes were running over the evening gown of her guest. Undoubtedly, Modesta was pretty, with her lily white complexion and ash blond hair, her brilliant eyes like aqua marine, and deep dimples that never rested; a plebeian prettiness perhaps, a prettiness that was assisted by all the arts — but an undeniable prettiness that her guest was forced to acknowledge to herself. And Catherine was sufficiently human to feel in the depths of her soul that she herself was not looking her best. In taking the gown from the cedar chest that afternoon, she realized its unfitness and quailing at the thought of impending humiliation, had been tempted at the last moment to refuse to come. But, influenced by complex motives, she went without protest. In the first place, she had a curiosity to see Ronald with Modesta; to see just how intimate they were. Then she thought it might be amusing to see those people in their own home; and perhaps there was the unacknowledged triumph of showing Modesta that,

though Ronald might be burning incense at her shrine, there was some one else, a very rich man, an accomplished man of the world, who was not one of Modesta's friends.

And now she was standing in the glare of the acetylene gas under Modesta's appraising eyes. Outwardly, she gave no sign of her inward disturbance, but moved on with an air of haughty unconcern after presenting Mr. Ogers, and listening to his and Ronald's conversation with their hostess.

The rooms were filled with masses of pink roses withering in the gas light; there was a deafening uproar of music from the orchestra secreted under the stairs; there was an inextricable tangle of ladies struggling about among the plants which obtruded themselves in every possible place, brushing the low ceilings and seeming to bring down waves of heat like cobwebs. There were ladies fat and ladies lean, ladies old and ladies young, all shrieking to make themselves heard; and like derelicts in a stormy sea, crimson-faced men in black broadcloth, mopping their steaming countenances and trying to appear happy.

Catherine glanced back at the receiving ladies standing like a row of stuffed birds, and wondered how long it would be before all collapsed in a faint. A group of young girls in the dining-room were chattering, laughing, and nibbling at the dainties. At one side, loaded with silver, stood a huge, carved sideboard.

She remembered a broken chair at Espérance that matched it.

"We shall die of heat prostration," Tom exclaimed, threading his way through the mass of dowagers standing plate in hand, eating patés and salads, cakes and ices. Catherine regarded them with horror. Such hot weather, and eating so much! He drew her toward an opening into what proved to be a conservatory. It had been robbed of the greater part of its plants, but there were still enough left to give it an air of seclusion. The lights from the dining-room mingling with the moonlight accentuated the shadows of the large-leaved palms and formed deep grottoes of shade. It was the first time she had been in a conservatory since she lost her own, and a wave of homesickness swept over her.

"There," he said, as he placed a bench by an open window, "that's a little better, but it's suffocating even here. Why do you suppose they elect to entertain in such weather?"

"I can't imagine," she replied. "It must have been from some sense of duty. No one could consider it a pleasure." She smiled, remembering how he had assured Modesta of his great joy in being there.

"Why are you smiling?" he asked.

"I was thinking," she said, "how one guest after another perjured himself to the hostess."

"Yes," he replied, "but wouldn't it be awful if we spoke the truth? Just think if I had said, 'Miss Piety, this is worse than the Black Hole of Calcutta. Nothing on earth could have induced me to come except —'"

"Except that you had heard how pretty and charming she was and what a belle."

"No, I'd have said, if I were speaking the truth, you know — May I tell you what I'd have said? Why I didn't want to stay at *Espérance* when you were coming to Gold Mine?" He looked smilingly at her, noting her lovely color, and there was a subtle flattery in his expression.

She looked demurely at him. "I heard you tell her how anxious you were to meet her," she said, "and I always believe what people say. But I'm sorry for all those men in black broadcloth. They are going to die of apoplexy. The mortality will be something frightful."

"Which one shall you regret most?" he asked.

"Fergus and Ronald," she replied.

"I'm not counting them," he said. "Who comes next?"

"Next!" she ejaculated. "There isn't any 'next.' You don't imagine do you, that I know the people out here? That I make companions of them?"

"Oh," he replied, "I beg your pardon. I didn't realize that there were no desirable ones at all. It must be very lonely for you."

"Lonely!" she repeated, all her pent-up discontent and rebellion audible in her tone. "It is unutterable. Beyond all description." The change from her usual tone was so sudden and complete that he scarcely knew how to meet it, and for a moment was silent.

"It must be awful," he said after a brief pause.

"I didn't realize how stranded you were." His tone was exquisitely soothing and sympathetic, but inwardly he was thinking: "So that is the rôle assigned to me; to rescue this Ariadne!" and he studied her with an appraising eye. "Not so bad, either," he thought. "I might go far and do worse. And it's time I settled down and had a permanent establishment."

Some one passed through the conservatory behind them, where the palms hid them from view. "No, Marc," said Modesta's thin, nasal voice (with its habitual accompanying laugh), "I don't love Ronald. I like him and I'm sorry for him, but I don't love him. And I'd die before I'd marry a man I didn't love."

Tom peeped through the leaves at the retreating figures. "Why," he exclaimed, "isn't that Marc Sutton, whom I met at the St. Francis club the other day?"

But Catherine did not hear him. With flashing eyes and burning cheeks she had listened to Modesta's words. "That insufferable girl!" she exclaimed.

Tom turned and looked at her. "You are acquainted with Sutton?" he asked; then, not waiting for an answer, "Oh, of course, you must be."

"I was his queen."

"Oh, yes," said Tom, "I remember now. A friend of mine was there and was crazy about you. Said he never saw a prettier profile. But he didn't say half enough, I see." His smile, as he looked at her, was in itself a compliment. "It's a proof of Sutton's discrimination, to choose you," he added after a pause;

"otherwise I shouldn't have supposed he had any."

"Not at all," she replied. "Rex doesn't choose his queen. The organization —"

The entrance of Père Ignace interrupted her. He saw the two by the window and was moving discreetly away when Catherine spoke: "Good evening, Père Ignace," she said. "Won't you join us?"

"Ah, Mees Catrine," he replied, coming and standing beside them. "You have found a spot of coolness? No?"

Tom, rising in acknowledgment of his introduction, stood in an attitude of polite boredom, hoping the priest would move on, and a trifle tantalized by her caprice.

"We mus' apologize for the 'otness of the weather," said Père Ignace. "It is the habit of our climate at this season."

"Those who come at this season must expect the heat," Tom observed. "And there are compensations in your beautiful country."

Père Ignace agreed. "Yes," he said, "there are many compensation. And as for the 'otness, it is necessary for the sugar planter. When he sleep under blanket, the cane do not grow."

"And I suppose the guests here to-night are nearly all planters," Tom remarked with a nice adjustment of courtesy and weariness which Catherine perceived.

"They are, with one exception; Mr. Sutton, Modesta's 'ouse guest."

"And you and Mr. Ogers," Catherine reminded him.

"Ah, yes, I forget; but we have take the precaution to flee. I remembered myself of Shadrac, Meshac, and Abednego, and I say to myself, 'I might not 'ave their luck.'" He refused Catherine's invitation to sit down, explaining that he was in search of the side gallery, "Where," he added, "I am assure' by our host there is the coolness of the Nors Pole."

"Then," she declared, rising, "we will go with you. We, too, seek that coolness."

Tom followed in silence. He was too experienced to be blind to the coquetry which made her wish not to seem unduly eager for his attentions. Yet, although he acknowledged to himself that it was clever of her, he was sufficiently piqued to wonder whether it could be she really was indifferent to his company. It was crude of her to fly into a temper and show her jealousy before a stranger, he thought, and now she's going to show she isn't such a little Miss Innocence after all. He wondered how old she was. She looked about eighteen — but must, certainly, be older.

The side gallery proved to be a cooler place than the conservatory and, seated in rocking chairs and fanned by a soft breeze, they were able to listen comfortably to the distant music and the rhythmic sound of dancing feet. The moon shining through the trees transformed into fairy banners the long festoons of moss where myriads of fireflies were drifting about with their golden lanterns.

"It's lovely here, isn't it?" Catherine said to Tom. "Isn't the moss picturesque?"

By this time his amiability had worn to a thin edge and he gave his whole attention to the cigarette he was lighting. The prospect of a trio for the whole evening did not appeal to him, and he pretended not to know she was addressing him until she repeated her observation. Then, tossing away the match, he glanced disparagingly about him. "Forgive me if I don't fully agree with you," he replied. "I know you Southerners particularly pride yourselves on your moss-draped trees, but, to my eyes, they look unsanitary. Like rags hung out to dry."

"Oh, how can you say so!" she exclaimed with inward amusement at his ill-temper. "Look at those festoons and garlands."

But he was quite as perverse and coquettish as she, so he replied that he was sorry not to share her enthusiasm. "It seems to me it would be so much more attractive," he said, "if all this *débris* were cleared away — those lower branches and that moss — and if they danced on the lawn instead of cooped up in that furnace."

"And got their feet wet with dew, and perhaps stepped on a snake?" she suggested with apparent innocence.

"A dance," said Père Ignace, interrupting the argument, "is nothing for me. If Modesta had give a barbecue — but a barbecue is not fashion."

"That would require a fire," interjected Tom. "That doesn't appeal to me at all in this weather."

"I never attended a barbecue," said Catherine demurely, concealing her glee.

"Never to see a barbecue! " Père Ignace said dreamily. "You 'ave miss 'alf the joy of life. Or a feesh fry? You 'ave attend a feesh fry, hein? "

"No, strange to say, I never have."

"Oh, mon Dieu! But it is a disadvantage to be of the city."

"You are very fond of fish? " she asked.

"By good fortune, yes. And crahb — if I would permit myself, I could eat crahb like Noré Pinel."

"How did he eat crab? "

"He place a wash-pot full of water on the fire. You h'observe, it is full. Your attention wander a little; when you behold again, it is empty. Like that, I could eat crahb."

"Père Ignace," she said, leaning toward him, "I have wondered whether there really ever was a Noré Pinel. I keep hearing about him: how he planted, how he fished, how he built a church, and now, how he cooked." She smiled bewitchingly as she spoke, and Tom, smoking in silence and studying her face in the moonlight thought, decidedly, this was the right girl for his establishment. Properly dressed, and in the setting he should give her, she would do him credit. And he'd know how to control her, he thought, with a tightening of the lips and a hardening of all the lines in his face. She'd play no ill-tempered pranks when she was his wife!

"I think Noré Pinel are a tradition," Père Ignace's voice broke in upon his revery.

"Like the liggeroos?" Catherine suggested.

"Yes, like many things we half believe. But I have many ancient record of this parish. If ever he exist, I can find heem. Yes, Mees Catrine, we will hunt out that Noré Pinel."

A scream of laughter from the dining-room made the three turn and look. A black haired youth was executing some sort of *pas seul* to the great delight of the giggling tea girls who were crowding around. Through the wide doorway beyond, a swirl of dancers could be seen sweeping in a circle like a merry-go-round and, most agile among them, Catherine beheld Miss Delicia. Morgiana in her palmiest days could never have approached her curveting and prancing. With crimson countenance and hair done in peaks like horns, she raged around, balancing and curtesying in front of Tobias Blaise, who with pallid face and glassy eyes solemnly pirouetted through his part of the figure. A head and a half taller than her partner, she hovered and swooped and dived around him like a bird of prey.

Tom, catching sight of her performance, broke into a fit of laughter heartier than any since his school days. "It's broad farce," he exclaimed, wiping his eyes and holding his aching side.

"The hotness in there is like the regions infernal," Père Ignace observed, restraining his own laughter by a great effort.

"I had no idea I should see anything so funny," Tom said, gasping for breath and breaking out into brief, uncontrollable shrieks. "Who is that old kangaroo?" as Miss Delicia again came leaping past their field of vision.

"She is my seester, M'sieur O-gers," Père Ignace replied.

A figure in maid's cap and apron now paused before the window. The moonlight shining full upon her revealed her expression of fathomless weariness and sorrow. Where had Catherine seen her before? That wan, ascetic face was as familiar to her as if she had known it all her life. And suddenly her impulse to laugh was gone in the presence of this embodied tragedy.

"Who is that girl, Père Ignace?" she asked.

"Félicie Trosclair."

"Félicie Trosclair!" she repeated. "Mr. Ovide Trosclair's daughter?"

"His niece."

"I didn't know he had a brother."

Père Ignace hesitated, then said quietly, "He never have a brother. He have a seester; Mees Hortense."

XXIII

THERE was open exultation in the conversation of the family gathered, the following morning, around the breakfast table at Gold Mine.

"I could have died laughin' when Miss Maine come in," said Mrs. Blaise. "Where do you reckon she ever got that rig?"

Modesta, exquisitely white and dainty in her elaborate negligee, looked uneasy. She was always uneasy when her parents were at ease. Like many another father and mother who had had no advantages themselves, they had given their only child all in their power of luxury and accomplishments, and were reaping the usual harvest of ingratitude. So, when her mother sneeringly commented on Catherine's appearance, Modesta, wishing to show her familiarity with such matters, answered with calm superiority, "She must have bought it when she was in Paris. That was a Drecoll, or Paquin gown."

"She come out of curiosity," Mrs. Blaise asserted. "She ain't set foot inside this house till now."

Mr. Blaise, sallow-faced, with the features of a razor-back hog, laughed a snarling laugh and glanced about the room with his pale, furtive eyes. "I reckon she was satisfied all right," he said. "I guess she

ain't been to many parties where they spent more for grub and music. They won't come to a cent less than a thousand dollars — and I reckon even the Maines would call that some party."

"Don't call it a 'party,' Dad," Modesta remonstrated. "It was a reception."

"Well, I guess them was party dresses you and your maw wore last night," he chuckled, "and them's party bills I'll be getting next month."

"Yes, that dress was a two-year-old," Mrs. Blaise ruminated, following out her train of thought.

"I guess so," chuckled Mr. Blaise, "and she ain't goin' to have many more, or I miss my guess. I've got them Maines right where I want them. So stuck up they were too grand to walk on this earth. Huhn! She couldn't come here till we give a party."

"Oh, Dad!" Modesta interrupted, not wishing Marc to think they had been slighted, "she has tried to be cordial, but you know she hasn't any way of getting around."

"Sure!" chimed in Mrs. Blaise, warned by her daughter's expression, "she said — no, it was him — I mean Mr. Fergus Maine. What was it he said, Destie?"

"He said she had become a recluse," Modesta explained.

"But she was just as cordial to Destie and I," Mrs. Blaise began.

"Yes, she's a 'recluse' all right," Mr. Blaise interrupted sneeringly. "And him, too; he's another.

When he was president of the St. Francis Club, he wanted to be a 'recluse' too. When my name come up for membership, he said he didn't want 'mere money' in the club. Huhn! He thought it ought to preserve 'higher standards.' Education was what they wanted and social position. Huhn! Education don't teach a man business sense, it seems. It don't teach him to hold on to his money, ner it don't teach him to make the crop. And it's just as sure as that," (taking a rose from the center of the table and crushing it with frightful vindictiveness), "he's gone up unless he can get some one to advance to him. And," he added with a snarling laugh, "he'll find out if I ain't good enough for the St. Francis Club, I ain't good enough to help him. You'll see! He'll be crawlin' round my feet the first of next January — and you know what I'll say? I'll say that!" and he spat upon the floor with a poisonous malice horrible to behold.

Rage is a terrifying thing, and Marc was frightened. Like most secretive natures, he could not acknowledge a fault unless absolutely forced to do so. He remembered the meeting at which Boggs, an obscure member, presented Blaise's name. Fergus Maine was absent and he, Marc Sutton, the Vice-President, occupied the chair. It was a merry meeting at which Boggs was silenced and put to shame while the members indulged themselves in witticisms concerning the unknown Blaise. There was disorder, a thing that never occurred when Fergus was presiding. Ever since his introduction at Gold Mine, Marc had lived in fear of

hearing that meeting mentioned, and now he experienced a great relief at discovering that Boggs had never told all the circumstances, and that Fergus received the blame.

"He called me a 'money-lender,'" said Tobias, (Marc remembered that some one had applied that opprobrious epithet to him). "But he'll find out I ain't so fierce on money-lendin' as he hopes. Huhn!"

"Isn't Mr. Ogers very wealthy?" Modesta asked. "He'll lend them the money, if —"

"Yes, 'if,'" her father interrupted. "But it's just that little 'if' that's goin' to upset their bucket of *cuite*. She ain't the first pretty girl what's set her cap for him, or I miss my guess — an' she ain't goin' to land him, neither," he prophesied.

At Espérance, the day dragged wearily to its end. Tom, it transpired, was in the habit of sleeping until noon, when his man, Alphonse, tiptoed into the room and awoke him. Then there was the carrying of innumerable buckets of hot water for his bath — a great hardship to Alphonse, who complained bitterly of the distance from the out-door kitchen. Then there were the difficulties of breakfast which must be prepared under Alphonse's own eye. Then there was a dispute to be settled between Alphonse who threatened to leave his master's service if "the niggers" were not forced to be more respectful to him, and Marcelline who persisted in repeating that he "Wa'n't nothin' but a servant hisself; an' he neenter put on no quality airs." Then, when Tom finally emerged like Phoebus Apollo,

perfumed, manicured, resplendent in his white suit, he was so obviously bored for lack of something to do that Catherine devoted herself to the task of amusing a blasé man, who perhaps already regretted that he was stranded in the country. In his mood, she saw a dim reflection of what she herself had been and, armed with the knowledge, she set about entertaining him. It was not strange that a rich man, accustomed to the flatteries of sycophants, should have misunderstood her motives. Furthermore, in the depths of his commercial heart, he believed that everything was to be had for money, and he only hoped she would not deprive him of the zest of pursuit by pursuing him.

It was evening before Catherine was able to have the interview with Marcelline she desired. But now, in the great shadowy kitchen, lighted only by a candle in a tin candlestick hung on the wall, she sank wearily down on a wooden stool, saying "What can we have tomorrow? I can't think of anything more, I'm so tired. Plan some Creole dishes: *sagamitté* and *grillards*, and *jambalaya* and corn pone with *sirop de batterie*. Something he's not accustomed to, and that will seem new and interesting to him."

In the dim candle light her face showed like a cameo against the cavernous background of shade. The old woman noted its pallor and said gently, "You is learn' a heap, sence you come to the kentry. You didn't so much ez know the names er them things when you comed, but M'sieur Alphonse say his boss want brilers fer his breakfus'. He seen them Rhode Red Islan's,

an' he tole his boss, an' he say his boss ain't custome' to no po'k-an'-cabbage mess like we gun him yestiddy, an' neither *he* ain't, neither. He have always reside, he say, with quality. An' I tole him he couldn' find no higher quality than he have right here to Espérance, but he wa'n't a-residin' with them, neither. He was jes' plain servant like we-alls. An' I tole him he mout be white er he mout be blue, but he out-niggered the blackes' cane fiel' hand on the bayou. An' he say his boss are richer an' han'somer than Mr. Fergus or either Mr. Ronal'; an' I say, 'Him, han'some! with his figger lumpin' out to every pint er the compass'—an' just then you comed in."

"Marcelline," said Catherine, "you must be patient and polite to company, don't you know? Now tell me something; who is Félicie Trosclair? Tell me about her."

"Ain't you never hear tell about her?" Marcelline asked in such surprise that she forgot her grievances against Alphonse.

"No; tell me."

"Hit war this-away," Marcelline began solemnly. In the dim light of the candle, the tall form with its white apron and gay head handkerchief took on something wildly picturesque. She seemed like a sibyl as she began in her deep, mellow voice: "She war born onlucky, an' her maw war onlucky before her. Miss Hortense' paw die before she war born, an' fum the fust minute she see the light er day, she war a hard-times, bad-luck baby. But purty! Miss Catrine,

she war as purty as what you is. An' when she went to them furrin' parts, she favored them angels what the hymn-chunes tells about. Then, Miss Catrine, when she come a-strayin' back with a baby in her arms, an' her eyes so wild an' pitiful, she wa'n't purty no more, Miss Catrine; she jes' favor' some poor little animule what war half beat to death. She war so solemn, with her great, big eyes — an' her poor little baby had that same look, like she've see sech awful trouble she couldn't smile no more. An' quiet? An' easy? An' scared? She war jest as still as a poor little bird what's ben caught in a trap an' don't dast to move. Mr. Ovide' wife rare an' charge an' say she cain't live with no sech truck. Mr. Ovide say he don't keer; he wa'n't goin' to turn them out like two stray dogs. But he war out in the fiel's most er the time, an' they listen to a heap of hard words, them two, 'case the young Madam warn't quality, an' this give her a chanst to hole her haid high."

"Why did Mr. Ovide let his niece go to work at Gold Mine?" Catherine asked.

"Who? Miss Hortense' li'le gal? Wukkin'? What dat you say? Is you sure? She mout lend a hand — but not wukkin' like a servant, were she?"

"She had on a maid's cap and apron."

"Oh," Marcelline groaned, leaning against the table as if unable to support her own weight, "pore li'le Missy! The Trosclairs was the proudest people on the top side er the yearth, time er the ole Madame; an' Miss Hortense were the very apple of her heart.

Miss Aggie Blaise' paw were stableman to Malabar an' she growed up in the quarters — an' now Miss Hortense' li'le gal are a-wukkin fer them folks! Is you sure, honey? "

"I'm sure," said Catherine. "I saw her."

"Oh, Lord! Lord! " Marcelline exclaimed in a kind of wailing chant, the while she rocked her body from side to side, "times is sure change' when Malabar wuk fer Gole Mine."

XXIV

WHEN Tom arrived, it was with the intention of staying two or three days at longest; but a week passed by and still he lingered, although his valet, unable to endure the discomforts of the country, had left within forty-eight hours. Tom had definitely made up his mind to marry Catherine, but, to his surprise, he found her more elusive than he could have imagined. All gentleness and grace one moment, the next, she was as aloof as a wild creature of the woods. Constantly baffled by her changing moods, his visit which, for a moment, seemed to threaten him with *ennui*, had taken on the excitement of the chase. He thought out a plan of action: he would give her humor for humor and show that he could be quite as perverse and capricious as she.

Catherine, for her part, realized the hazardous game she was playing, but having as fully made up her mind as he had his, she skirted as near the precipice as she dared. She knew she must not go too near — too much depended on his good-will — but neither could she deny herself the pleasure of tantalizing this man of the world who was so sure of himself. And so she danced ahead like a will-o'-the wisp, always just beyond his reach.

Fergus and Ronald, walking along the dusty road

toward the sugar house one day, were discussing the situation: "He's been here an entire week," Ronald said. "Now that he's decided to take the pound of flesh and advance barely enough money to make the crop, I wish he'd go! He was so eager to get hold of those mortgage notes, his mouth watered. Didn't you notice? He didn't seem like that at Worcester."

"No, because you were on an equality then. It's the difference between poverty and wealth. The rich don't realize their selfishness, Ronald. It's a very exceptional nature that can put itself in the place of the other man. They have no experience to guide them. They don't walk when they're tired —"

"Or eat dry salt shoulder," Ronald interjected. "Did you notice the charming grace with which he helped himself to all the white meat of the chicken, and left the neck and gizzard for us?"

Fergus took out his handkerchief and flicked the dust from his shoes. Always a fastidious man, he had grown painfully conscious of his appearance; of his ill-cut hair, his shiny coat, and his linen that was beginning to fray at the edges.

Ronald watched him dusting his shabby, carefully polished shoes. "If there were anything spectacular about poverty," he said, "it wouldn't be so hard to bear. There is dignity in suffering for one's country or one's faith; but to be merely poor and shabby, trudging around in the mud and dust, eating coarse food and drinking water without ice in it — there's nothing ennobling about that."

"I don't agree with you," Fergus replied, straightening himself and replacing his handkerchief in his pocket, "I believe there is something ennobling in enduring the hardships of the march. We have an example before our eyes of how enervating constant self-indulgence is, both to body and mind."

"Poverty is so degrading," Ronald persisted. "You coarsen with your coarse surroundings; or at least you seem to coarsen. And very soon men like Tom Ogers accept the situation for you and begin advising you and telling you how the refined, cultured, rich people of the world behave. I don't mind so much for myself, but it is dreadful to see you and Catherine in so degrading a position."

"Humiliating, you mean, not 'degrading,'" Fergus corrected. "No outside circumstance can degrade us in the true sense of the word, any more than a poor garment can impoverish the soul. People don't mean to humiliate the poor — they simply don't understand them. I can see how blind I myself was. In that phrase, 'The poor ye have always with you,' I thought of poverty vaguely as a sad dispensation, indirectly meant as a benefit for the rich in calling out their finer qualities. Now that I am one of the ever-present poor, I think I have a clearer understanding."

"Well," Ronald observed after a pause, "it's time for Tom to go home to his much-lamented valet, and shower bath, and *pâté-de-foie-gras*."

"You know why he doesn't go," Fergus said quietly.

"Yes, I know," Ronald acknowledged with a slight

laugh, "and it didn't require a prophet to foresee what would happen when he came. But what a dance she's leading him! And in such hot weather. I don't blame him for looking tragic. I suppose he would say with Sisyphus: 'Mine at worst is everlasting hope.'"

Fergus was silent for a moment. "I have thought," he finally said, "that perhaps it is our duty to open her eyes to some of his characteristics."

"My dear Fergus," Ronald ejaculated. "Catherine's eyes are the clearest and widest-open in the world. She sees him as he is. Depend upon it. Besides, I doubt if advice from *us* would have any effect other than to hasten the marriage. You don't imagine she would listen to me, do you?"

"Perhaps not," Fergus acknowledged with a sigh. "You irritate each other a little, don't you?"

"No, not 'a little,' but very much indeed," Ronald replied. "She misunderstands everything I say or do — and perhaps I misunderstand her."

"You used to love each other so dearly," Fergus said sadly.

Ronald flushed and looked away. "I'm not at all sure she ever loved me," he replied. Then, after a pause, "You remember that verse in *Fridthiof's Saga*: 'Trust not to one night's ice, To spring day snow, To serpent's slumber, Or to maiden's vow; For heart of woman turneth like a wheel, And 'neath the snowy breast doth falsehood dwell.'"

"Fridthiof was harsh," Fergus commented. "I

don't like to think such things of our little Catherine. The privations we suffer make us nervous, I suppose. And she's young and without resources. No wonder if she longs to escape."

In the garden of Espérance, Ananias and Pidgeon were hoeing grass and, seeing Tom and Catherine walking along the bayou's bank toward the bridge, they paused in their work and watched them.

"He shore look fine in them white clo'es," Pidgeon observed.

"Chukey gwine quit, lessen the Madam get someone to help with the pressin,'" said Ananias. "She say she cain't press all them things by herself."

"He shore have got a plenty," Pidgeon agreed. "An' he make me count his hankercher, an' his collar, an' his sock, an' he holler at me effen I makes a mistake. I wisht to goodness the Madam didn't make me wait on him when Mr. Alphonse quit. Mr. Nias," Pidgeon leaned on his hoe and spoke impressively, "he are that stingy, he regrudge everybody else the air they breathes. Sence the revelation er Jonah, they ain't nuver ben nobody so stingy like what he are. He ain't nuver give me nothin' ceppin yestiddy. He tore the buttinghole er his collar when he war a buttenin' it, an' he say, 'Here, Stoopid, effen you was wuth you salt, you'd a-knewn how to butting it for me,' and with that, he fling it at me an' he say, 'You kin have it.' An' when he seen me a-lookin' at it, he get mad an' tell me not to look a gifted horse in the mouth. An' he say niggers is ongrateful anyway you fixes 'em, an'

they'd ruther steal than have things gave 'em. Mr. Nias, I nigh about bust, I was that mad. An' you know how big his neck are? That ole collar would a made a belt fur Miss Marcelline."

"An' you nuver sass him?" Ananias inquired with deep interest.

"Yassir, I did. Jest once. An' I trust to the Lord he don't tell our Madam, but Moses neither Job couldn't a had patience with him. You knows, Mr. Nias, the Madam say as how I warn't to wake him twell the kitchen clock alarm? Well, I waits twell she alarms. Then I goes, soft an' easy, to wake him. You know that there bedroom door squawk when you opens it?"

"Yes. I promus the Madam to grease the hinges, but I forgot."

"Well, he were sleepin' so proud I hears him clean out to the kitchen but any how I goes, like the Madam tell me; an' when I opens that door, she squawk like she always do. I didn't go to do it, Mr. Nias, but the slower you opens that door, the louder she squawk, an' he mos' jump outer his skin, he wake so suddint. An' with that, he holler at me, 'What you sneakin' in that-a-way fur? I ben awake a hour waitin' fur you.' But you know that were a hardened lie, Mr. Nias, 'case I hearn him a-sleepin'. An' he say, 'You is fixin to steal suthin whiles I sleeps, but you doesn't catch me so easy.' An' with that, I ups an' tells him I didn't want none er them big balloon clo'es er hisn, an' besides, I axes my own boss fer what I wants, an' no-

body else; an' when I axes my boss, he don't show me the back er his hand, neither."

"Pidgeon," said Ananias impressively, "we is sometimes under compellerations to wuk fer street angels and house devils. I seen him a-squinchin' up them little yaller eyes er hisn, a-grinnin' at Miss Catrine, an' I says to myself, 'I trus' the Lord don't let her marry him, 'case you kin marry ez rich ez cream an' yet be to the last er misery.'"

"An' he talk so mild an' soft an' easy to her," Pidgeon continued, "an' behine her back, he kin out-cuss Cain and Abel. Did you hear him the day Miss Chukey were a-wool-gatherin' an' crease his pants down the side, instead er in front?"

"I suttinly did," Ananias replied. "He war mad-dog mad at her, an' he say, 'How you reckon I is gwine ter look effen I puts on them things?' I layed off to tell him how he look to me, but then I study how our Madam say she pintedly forbid her servants to sass him." He sighed, spat upon his hands and resumed his hoeing.

Meantime the object of these criticisms was not so happy as his observers imagined. Having risen that day with the determination to have a final, explicit talk with Catherine, in which he would give her plainly to understand that she was endangering her chances with him, he learned to his annoyance, that she had gone driving early that morning and would not return until dinner. There was nothing to do but wait, and while he did so, he reviewed his discomforts of the past

week. Calling to Marcelline, he demanded if there were no books in the house for him to read while he had nothing else to do.

She answered politely but with suppressed hostility that there was a Bible in Mr. Fergus's room, but she didn't suppose he would care to read that.

"Holy smoke!" he ejaculated. "Is that the most recent literature this place affords?"

"There are the *Épée* from Bergerac."

"The A pay! What's that?"

"The paper from Bergerac."

"Well, bring that." But the meager news did not entertain him many minutes, and he went out on to the gallery where he walked back and forth, fanning himself and impatiently watching for Catherine's return. What was his surprise to find her in the dining room when dinner was announced, looking cool and crisp in her white dress and much astonished to learn where he had been waiting for her.

"Why," she exclaimed sympathetically, "it was sunny there. If you'd gone on to the shady side gallery you'd have seen me when I came through the cane field. It's lovely there. As you look across the top of the cane it seems all rippling like little waves. Later, when it's tall, it seems like a solid wall of green."

After dinner, she went to the kitchen to give some order to Marcelline, and he next discovered her walking on the bayou bank. When she heard him panting after her, she turned with the most innocent, sympa-

thetic expression and said, "Oh, how out of breath you are!"

It was disagreeable to think of the spectacle he presented with the perspiration streaming down his crimson face, and in spite of himself, his voice took on a sharp edge as he demanded, "Why didn't you tell me you were going right out again?" Then, without waiting for an answer, "And what was the need of your taking that drive alone this morning? You know I'd have gone with you."

"Oh, would you?" She seemed surprised. "I didn't go alone. Miss Victorine was with me; but I'm sorry we didn't take you if you'd have enjoyed it."

He ignored the implication that he would have enjoyed going with Miss Victorine as an addition to the company, and asked, "Where did you go?"

"To get some fresh vegetables. I heard that Madame Jabart had some lovely *mirlitons*. I was sure you would like them."

"Why didn't you have some one wake me? You might at least have given me the chance to say whether I wished to go or not."

"I did think of it," she acknowledged, noting with inward amusement the aggrieved and accusing tone of his voice. "I had Pidgeon listen at your door, but when he told me how soundly you were sleeping, I wouldn't let him disturb you for anything."

His flushed face grew a deeper mahogany color. It was not pleasant to think of Pidgeon's reporting

that he was snoring his head off. "Well," he persisted fretfully, "what was the need of your starting right out again now? Couldn't you stay a little while with me?"

"I am with you, am I not?" she asked with tantalizing sweetness. She, too, was suffering from the hot weather and the mosquitos, and her most ardent wish at that moment was that he would go home. His business with Fergus having been completed to her satisfaction, she was ready to speed the parting guest.

Looking moodily away from her he caught sight of Fergus and Ronald walking toward the sugar house. At that moment, Fergus made a gesture of the hand habitual with him when talking earnestly, and Tom laughed. "He's giving Ronald some good advice," he said. "For a man that has lived in the world, he's a good deal of a city missionary, isn't he?"

The brilliancy of her inquiring glance should have warned him, but the possibility of her refusing him had not entered the range of his imagination, and he went on unguardedly. "You and Ronald do take a lot of preaching. I don't see why you stand it."

"Stand it!" she repeated; "if it weren't for Fergus, I'd simply die of loneliness out here. He's my only comfort. He's an angel, Fergus is."

"I dare say," Tom replied in a slighting tone, "but I suppose I haven't met enough angels to acquire a taste for their company. They seem to me rather insipid, socially."

"Of course," she agreed with ominous quiet, "I

shouldn't expect you to understand a man like Fergus."

He gave a short laugh. "Oh, there's nothing very complex about a nature like his," he retorted, losing control of his temper and prudence. "He's in just the right environment here where he'll not be tempted to try to manipulate the Stock Market. It takes something more than mere angelic goodness to pull off such a sketch as he tried with the Metropolitan Bank."

Her eyes blazed, but she made no reply.

"And as for Ronald," he went on, "I suppose you think he's another angel, and perhaps he is. Any way, he doesn't show much initiative as far as mundane affairs go. Frankly, all Ronald's friends are disappointed in him. We used to prophecy that he'd set the Hudson river on fire — and here he is, a clerk on a plantation way down here at the jumping off place."

For a moment, Catherine remained silent. Truth to tell, she too had felt disappointed in Ronald. That he should fail of his appointment, and then be so lacking in resourcefulness as to sink contentedly into this minor position on a remote sugar plantation, was not what she had imagined for him. But it was one thing to have this secret thought, and another to hear it put into words. Her cheek reddened as Tom talked, and she asked with elaborate politeness, "Have you any further criticisms to make on our family? May I inquire in what way *I* am displeasing?"

"Yes," he replied, "you may and I will tell you that there is a limit to my patience —"

“And to mine,” she flashed back. “And the limit is exactly the point you have reached. Talk about us all you like behind our backs, but please reserve your criticisms until you are at a distance.”

“Well!” he exclaimed; and so astonished was he that he did not say another word, but threw himself moodily upon the bench under the China tree at Miss Victorine’s gate while Catherine walked rapidly up the path between the rose bushes.

XXV

MISS VICTORINE, watching through the crack of the door while Tom and Catherine crossed the bridge and turned toward her front gate, naturally concluded that they were coming to call upon her, and was disappointed when he threw himself upon the bench. Then, with renewed pleasure, she watched Catherine coming up the walk, until, at the psychological moment, when her foot touched the step, the little old lady opened wide the door and welcomed her in. With much ceremony she escorted her guest into the parlor and offered her one of the three glasses of orange flower water which she had hastily brought and arranged upon the center table the moment she perceived the direction the two were taking.

Catherine was still quivering with agitation from her conversation with Tom — from listening to his insinuations and slurs upon Fergus and criticisms of Ronald — but forcing herself to an outward appearance of calm, she responded cordially to Miss Victorine's greeting.

"The water are not cold," the old lady apologized regretfully. "M'sieur Bergeron 'ave not brought the hice, it is now many day."

"No," said Catherine, "we haven't had ice, either,

for some time. I suppose it melts in coming so far in the cart."

"I suppose," Miss Victorine agreed; "but soon the Mail Boat will come as far as Espérance, an' then we will 'ave hice, hein?"

After explaining her errand — that she wished to buy some broilers — Catherine raised her glass and said, "May I drink this to your health?"

"But no! I beg!" the little old lady cried out in evident alarm, "it bring disaster to drink 'ealth in water. I might lose all my chicken," and she entered upon a long account of the intricacies and dangers of chicken-raising, and of her battles with minks and snakes. "Yes, Mees Catrine," she concluded, "I has went out in the chicken 'ouse when the night made so black I could not see two finger before my nose." She illustrated by holding two fingers close to her nose, and, unconsciously, looking cross-eyed at them. "And what are the result?" she demanded and nodded smilingly at Catherine as a prolonged uproar in the rear of the house announced that a hen had laid an egg.

In a tree that shaded the side window a mocking-bird was singing in liquid cadences, and now a human voice joined in the melody; clear, and sweet and plaintive. Miss Victorine listened for a moment, then called, "It is thou, Félicie?"

"Yes, Miss Victorine," the girlish voice answered, and in the open door that connected the parlor with the dining-room, appeared Félicie Trosclair.

In a great rush of affection, Catherine's heart went out to the child of Hortense Trosclair, as the girl, her black straw hat pushed back from her face, set down the basket she was carrying and timidly acknowledged her introduction to "Mees Maine."

"Come," said Miss Victorine, "sit thee down and drink a glass of orange flower syrup; see, it wait for thee."

Catherine asked Félicie if she had walked all the distance from Gold Mine, but the old lady answered for her that Félicie never walked, "They wouldn' trus' her to walk all that long ways when it meks hot like to-day." Then, as a deep pallor succeeded the flush on the young face, she asked anxiously, "Thou didst not walk, hein?"

"Yes, Miss Victorine, I walked."

"But the otomobile pass', it is not two minute."

"They will take me back with them."

"I 'ope so!" Miss Victorine exclaimed indignantly. "With all that basket of egg? *Huhn! Tiens!* Tranquilize thyself, two minute. Thou hast finish? Set they glass upon the table and rest they head upon my knees like when thou wast a little chile. There," as the girl obeyed. "That is well. You will permit us two minute delay, Mees Catrine?"

"With pleasure," said Catherine, and, remembering Tom, she gave a fleeting glance out of the window. He was drowsily fanning himself. Slowly and ever more slowly, like the pendulum of a clock that is running down, his hand moved. It stopped, and the white

panama hat, slipping from the loose fingers, rolled upon the ground.

Meantime Félicie, on a low stool, was sleeping with her head on Miss Victorine's knees. "When I marry M'sieur Chauvin," the old lady said in a hushed voice, smoothing the child's dark hair with a toil-hardened, but gentle hand, "I live to Bonne Poignée, where he was overseer for M'sieur Evariste Ledoux. It is nex' to Malabar, an' my occasion for going there was very often. Mees Hortense, the mother of this chile, was young then — a little girl — of a sweetness an' goodness, it was to marvel. This pore chile," the keen eyes were moist as she spoke, "was not yet born; it go without saying."

"How old is she?" Catherine asked softly so as not to disturb her sleep.

"She 'ave fourteen year; but you would not give her so much, hein?"

"Why, no!" Catherine exclaimed in surprise. "Are you sure?"

"Very sure, for her birth was a calamity never to be forgot. An' when her mother die, I would have take her — but there was many obstacle. I regret now — but what will you? We all 'ave many regret. We do not see the end from the beginning. It seem best at Gole Mine where Mees Aggie Blaise — Madam Blaise — would remember past kindness, it appear to me. She will repay it to this chile. She will give her the advantage her mother so much desire for her. She will travel; she will see the world. With me, she

grow up Cajan," Miss Victorine glanced deprecatingly at Catherine. "She will not even speak American like she ought. Until to-day I believe all this. To-day I am undeceive' and I regret. But what will you?" A tear ran down her long, sharp nose and dropped on Félicie's cheek. The child drowsily patted Miss Victorine's knee and smiled in her sleep.

"She has no fever?" Catherine asked, laying her hand on the child's forehead.

At the touch, Félicie opened her eyes, and after a moment of bewilderment, asked in an anxious tone, "Have I slept long, Miss Victorine? They will be back and I must be ready. May I have six dozen eggs?"

"As many as thou wilt, dear heart," Miss Victorine replied, rising and leading the way through her immaculate kitchen. With the basket on her arm she rustled ahead in her starched petticoats, and disappeared into the hen-house; first explaining that, if they wished, they might look over the fence into the enclosure where she kept her broilers, and select those "Mees Catrine" desired for Espérance.

As Miss Victorine delayed her coming, Félicie stood gazing at a cloud drifting over the tree tops. Catherine, beside her, looked up too. "A cloud!" she ejaculated. "I hope more are coming."

"How beautiful it is, streaming up that way into the sky. Don't you love the clouds, Miss Maine?" Félicie said timidly.

"Yes, I do love them," Catherine replied. "Have

you noticed what beautiful sunsets we have been having? ”

“ I am busy at that hour,” Félicie answered: “ But haven’t you noticed the lovely sunrises? ”

“ I’m busy at that hour — sleeping,” Catherine acknowledged. “ But I’ll have Marcelline wake me to see it to-morrow morning — and I’ll think about you. Will you be sure to think of me? ”

“ Indeed I will,” Félicie declared; “ to-morrow morning and every morning.”

“ I can’t promise to be up at that hour every morning, I’m too lazy,” Catherine confessed, “ but I’ll think of you at sunset.”

“ I’ll be glad to know someone is thinking about me,” Félicie said shyly, “ It will be company for me.” She flushed as if fearing she had said too much. “ Do you see the face on that side? ” she asked still looking up. “ Isn’t it wonderful? Oh, look at that long lock of hair streaming back! It’s changing now. It has horns! It’s a goat. Look at its beard.”

“ That ain’t right, Félicie,” Miss Victorine remonstrated, backing out of the hen-house with her heavy basket of eggs. “ I’m scared it are a sin to try to see them things in the clouds; heads with horns, an’ things like that. Dost thou say thy little prayer thy mother taught thee? ”

“ No, Miss Victorine,” Félicie confessed as she went forward to help carry the basket, “ I try to, but I always go to sleep before it is done.”

“ Alas, pore chile,” Miss Victorine exclaimed pity-

ingly, "thou art too tired. Say thy little prayer in the mornin', an' I will ask Père Ignace to dispense thee with repeating it at night. No — better yet — I will say two prayer at night; one for thee and one for me. Then thou canst sleep in peace."

As they were setting the basket in the shade of the pecan tree by the side gate, from far away, they heard the honk, honk of an automobile. The girl stood as if transfixed, the brightness fading from her face as she watched the spot of scarlet coming nearer and nearer, growing more and more distinct as it flashed between the trees on the bayou road. The three waited in silence. Nearer it came and nearer until they discerned Modesta, all in white with her face swathed in a shimmering veil, and beside her, Marc Sutton.

There are supreme moments that stand out like high lights in our lives, and this was one for Modesta Blaise, as she sat in her own car beside the future senator, while Catherine Maine, the ex-queen of the Carnival, stood by the dusty roadside. Ignoring Félicie, and with a careless nod to Miss Victorine, Modesta greeted Catherine with effusion, and Marc, descending from the car, shook hands with her. He spoke of the heat, of the long-continued drought, hoping that Espérance was not suffering and regretting that his many engagements had made it impossible to get over to see her again. Then, as Catherine made a move to help Félicie lift the basket, he stepped forward with a polite, "Permit me,"

Modesta looked on with an expression of curiosity, wondering that the haughty Catherine Maine should put herself on an equality with a servant, and unable to comprehend the pride that scorned to deny a poor relation. In the parishes, kinship extends to the remotest cousins; would Miss Maine own this connection to Marc Sutton?

"Good-by, Félicie," Catherine said, taking the child's hand, "don't forget your promise." Then, turning to Marc, "You know, we found relatives out here in the country—the Trosclairs of Malabar. This little girl is my cousin." And, with infinite grace, she bent and kissed her.

Modesta's heart leaped within her. This repaid her for all the slights, real and imaginery. Now, now was her hour of triumph; and she rode on, her head erect, her heart swelling with that fierce rapture of revenge that is sometimes mistaken for joy.

Catherine said good-by to Miss Victorine (the more courteously that Modesta had shown her such scant consideration), and promising to send Pidgeon for the broilers, walked on in deep thought, pondering the world-old problem of good and evil. Why were there such differences in life, she wondered. Such cruel differences! Why was that defenceless little creature so crushed! And why was she herself so poor that she could not help the child! What a pitiful, degraded thing human nature was! Marc with his silly, society lies. But there were exceptions; Miss Victorine, pure in heart and self-forgetful. Good as gold in spite of

her queer superstitions and her ignorance. And Fergus, high-minded and self-sacrificing. And Ronald — yes, Ronald —

At this moment, a horseman overtook her and swinging lightly down from the saddle, spoke to her. He was glowing with color, with life, with a repressed excitement at seeing her. He said he had found a wonderful, blossoming vine in the woods. Might he bring it to her? His voice was eager and she, knowing that he was making an excuse to stop, looked up at him with complex emotions. Dimly she recognized the danger of condescending to this boy who must never cross the gulf that lay between them. What would he do if he understood his true position? The thought of Lochinvar flashed through her mind. Would this elfish being, if he knew the truth, sweep her away, carry her off like that wild highlander? The thought gave her an unacknowledged thrill, and, drawn on by the dangerous fascination of her own power, and by an unwillingness to commit an apparent unkindness, she deferred explanation and committed the real cruelty of leaving him in error. Unaware that her own face reflected something of his expression, she said, "Will you? I should be delighted," and extended her hand in token that she wished him to go.

With unconcealed emotion, he took it and raised it to his lips, then, mounting, galloped away without a word, leaving her half afraid of the spirit she had evoked.

They had talked together for five minutes, but in those five minutes, Ronald saw them from the window of the sugar-house near-by, and Tom, watching them between half-closed lids, sat up and uttered an ejaculatory oath.

XXVI

WHEN Tom left, it was with protestations of friendship on his lips. He made a list of books that Fergus especially missed in the treatise on Numismatics which he was trying to finish from memory.

"You can't do it without books of reference," Tom repeated more than once. "Macauley's and Gladstone's memories combined would have been inadequate to such a task. But I'll send you *Poole's Catalogue of Ptolemaic Coins*, and I'll poke up the *American Numismatic and Archeological Society* — that's the right name, isn't it?" referring to the memorandum he held.

He was as smiling and chatty as on the morning of his arrival, and as he drove away to take the train at Bergerac, Fergus said, "That man has a good heart. His faults are on the surface." As the vehicle disappeared around the bend of the road, he added, "Ronald doesn't trust him, but I fear we are growing suspicious in our natures — living so much alone. I was sorry Ronald insisted on accompanying him to Bergerac."

"Yes," Catherine agreed, "I think it was a work of supererogation."

"Not that, Cathie," Fergus corrected her. "He

has done us an inestimable service. He has saved us, in fact. I believe, in spite of his satiric manner, he's a good friend."

"Hardly that, I think," she replied. In her own mind, she thought, "He can't hurt us. He's signed the papers." But she felt secretly dissatisfied with herself that she should have waited until Espérance was safe, and then to have shown so plainly that he wearied her.

Marcelline, with a letter in her hand, knocked on the frame of the open door. "Miss Catrine," she said, "Unc' Timothy Brim have came up the bayou this mornin' an' lef' this letter fer you. He say, he mout be goin' to the oyscher reef, one er these days, an' he were boun' to give this to you 'fore he went. He say he ben layin' off to bring it too long to talk about, an' I were to put it right in you hand an' not let nobody else tech it."

Wonderingly, Catherine took the letter and, opening it, read:

"This is to be given you after my death, so I write without any excuse except my great need. In the belief that you have not heard my true story, I will repeat it for the last time.

"I was married, fifteen years ago, on the fourth of November, in the Church of St. Pancras, London, to your cousin, Ralph Fessenden. My godmother, with whom I had been living, had died suddenly, leaving me quite alone. There was no one to object to

our marriage, but, as it proved, we were unwise not to notify our relatives. We were so happy we forgot the rest of the world. The following year our daughter was born near the village of Grindelwald. It would have been easy to verify these statements had any one cared to do so.

"I am sure he loved me as I loved him, and shall to the end of eternity. But he is dead. I don't know where. He left me one morning to walk to the village. I have never seen him since. I need not tell you what people said when I came back to Malabar. The world is a cruel place, and soon I must leave my poor little one in it, alone. You have such a winning voice, such a lovely face, and you claimed kinship with me. You did not know my story, and you are so young I dared not accept your friendship lest you break my heart later by withdrawing it.

"Mrs. Blaise has offered to take my daughter as her own. She has wealth and can provide for my little one. But if her home should not prove a refuge, if they should grow tired of her — there are a thousand things might happen — if there is need, I beg you to protect her. From the grave I shall thank and bless you.

"HORTENSE TROSCLAIR FESSENDEN."

For a moment she felt dazed, as if a voice had spoken from the tomb. Then in sudden excitement she cried, "Ralph Fessenden was Félicie's father!" Scarcely able to contain herself, she ran out to the front gallery to impart the wonderful news to Fergus. He had al-

ready gone to the sugar house, so, feeling the imperative need of some one in whom to confide, she went in search of Marcelline. But Marcelline had gone out to the cow lot, whither Catherine feared to follow. So, as a last resort, she put on her hat and started for Miss Victorine's.

She found the old lady in her garden inspecting a row of flourishing okra plants, and, without the usual (and expected) compliments on the garden and poultry yard, burst impetuously into her story.

"And I wish you would take me right over to Gold Mine," she concluded. "I'm not going to let that child stay there another moment. I'm going to bring her to Espérance. I don't think they treat her well."

"As for that," Miss Victorine agreed, "that are very true. You know," she spoke guardedly, lowering her voice so that Uncle Peter who was weeding nearby might not hear, "when that Mees Snive' were here, they accuse little Félicie — but let us not speak of it."

"I know," Catherine replied. She was impatient to be off and wondered at the slowness of a person who was usually so nervously quick to act. "Can't Uncle Peter harness the horse?"

"Mees Catrine," said the old lady, coming close and speaking very cautiously, "Félicie are no longer there. She are gone."

"Gone!" Catherine ejaculated. "Where?"

Miss Victorine made a warning motion. "Yes, Mees Catrine. She are safe. Père Ignace know where. He are satisfy. He caution me to be satisfy

also, and he say there are many thing to be arrange' before her refuge are reveal'. If Père Ignace are satisfy, we may repose our mind, hein? "

" Yes," Catherine agreed, " I suppose so."

" *Certes!* If he, who baptize' her and her mother, and who love them, are satisfy, should not we? "

" I suppose so," Catherine repeated, speaking slowly and in a disappointed tone. They were standing in the shade of the pecan tree at the side gate, and she looked across at the priest's house. " I wonder if he would tell me," she said.

" Père Ignace? *Non!* Not if the president of the United State' ask. Not if he promise an' vow an' swear! *Non!* "

" I suppose there's no use," Catherine said.

" I assure you, no," said Miss Victorine. " But, Mees Catrine, all things come with patience. As we know she are safe, we can wait, hein? "

" I suppose so," Catherine acknowledged regretfully and turned homeward.

XXVII

AUTUMN had come, and once more the grinding was at hand. A year and a half had passed since Catherine and Fergus took that long drive into exile. Since that day, the bleak, cold rains of March had twice come and gone; the early spring with its tender green and roseate foliage, its fleecy clouds and first, tentative bird notes; the splendid pageantry of the advancing season with its pomp of oleander and jessamine, of crêpe myrtle and pomegranate. Then the summers, when the cane fields seemed to swell upward like a rising tide of verdure; when the air was full of the voices of birds; the flute-like note of the thrush, the rapid warble of the oriole, the melodious song of the mocking-bird; the plaintive, silvery tremolo of the owl, lamenting in the perfumed dusk. The succession of long, hot days, drenched with the vivid gold of the sunlight; the nights, resplendent with moonlight, with starlight, and with the fairy-like glitter of fire-flies dripping downward through the air like globules of molten gold; all were past, and now again autumn was here. The sunlight growing more remote, still shone warmly on the fast-browning vegetation which sent out a pungent odor as if bruised. Tiny butterflies like bits of black velvet fluttered about the golden-rod, the yellow coffee-weed, and the tall, feathery grasses like

burnished copper which covered the bayou's bank. The soft haze of the St. Martin's summer mellowed the distant woods, which showed green and gray and golden-brown against the silvery sky.

The sugar house which had lain dormant through the long months of summer, now awoke to a feverish activity. There was a sound of hammering and sawing, and of many voices talking, and singing.

In overhauling the machinery, a break was discovered which, Placide Chauvin said, must be repaired before the grinding began. They must send to the city at once for a skilled mechanic and, to Catherine's surprise, Fergus asked her if she would be willing to carry a letter to Bergerac to mail, adding, "It must be sent by special delivery. Should you be willing to attend to it for me?"

"*Willing!*" she cried; "I'd *love* to."

"And will you bring me some money from the bank? I've made out the check in your name."

"Oh, Fergus!" she exclaimed. "This seems like living; to be doing something!"

And so it came about that on a lovely morning in October she was on her way to Bergerac. As the mules plodded drowsily along, roused now and then by a perfunctory "Giddap!" from Pidgeon, she looked about her at the fields, the woods, the bayou. She had never seen this road but once, and then through a veil of winter rain and despairing tears. Now the warm, autumn breeze was blowing softly, and a kingfisher flying ahead paused; then, as they drew near, flew on

and waited. Miles and miles, along the windings of the bayou, in the softened sunlight, past a clump of woodland, around another bend, and Bergerac lay before them.

The town was an irregular sprinkling of houses and of wide gardens filled with large-leaved, semi-tropical plants, between which the red-tiled roofs gleamed picturesquely. Lying as it did in the angle formed by the bayou and canal, it cast a rainbow reflection on the brown waters. Here and there a plastered house of pale green or blue or pink shining through the foliage of encircling trees, gave an added touch of gayety to the scene. Oleanders and crêpe myrtles, gigantic "elephant ears"; and banana plants ragged and stately like impoverished grandees, leaned over the fences into grass grown lanes bordered with Cherokee roses and the deep purple rose which here grows wild. In these lanes the humming birds flashed from blossom to blossom, the bees gathered their honey droningly, and the tiny green lizards darted about in the sun. The bayou and canal were filled with fishing craft of every shade; green, blue, red, yellow, with vast sails of white or crimson, and with glistening cargoes of silvery fish, of coral colored shrimp, of oysters in their bluish shells, of vegetables and fruits in every hue. It was a glowing riot of color.

As Catherine's rattling surrey crossed the bridge and drew up before the little frame building, placarded *L'Hotel de l'Univers*, the row of men seated on the front gallery removed their feet from the railing, sat

up straight, and looked with interest at the newcomers. Pidgeon they recognized and so were able to guess at Catherine's identity. A corpulent, bald-headed man rose to his feet and, introducing himself as Monsieur Duval, the proprietor of the hotel, assisted "Mees Maine" in descending from the vehicle, escorted her to the best room in the house, urged her to make herself comfortable, then returned to the gallery to appease the curiosity of his friends. All felt the liveliest interest, and wondered why she had come to Bergerac. Monsieur Duval hazarded the suggestion that she might have occasion to go to the bank, and a long-drawn "A-h-h-h!" spoke volumes of comprehension on the part of his hearers; for, although Catherine knew little about Bergerac, Bergerac knew much about Catherine as, indeed, it did about every one on the bayou. And although the fate of the universe might not be settled on the little gallery of the *Hotel de l'Univers*, the character, fortune, and probable future of every planter for many miles around were there fully discussed and decided upon. So it was not surprising to them to hear that "Mees Maine" was probably going to the bank. Of course, M'sieur Maine and M'sieur Ronal' were too busy with preparations for the grinding; and it was very, very important that some one should see M'sieur Arcimon, the banker, before the grinding began.

When Catherine went into the great, square dining-room, where strings of snowy garlic and scarlet peppers hung from the rafters, and where her feet crunched the

glittering, white sand with which the floor was sprinkled, she could still hear the men talking on the gallery.

"Mees Maine 'ave bring a letter from the boss to send to the city for a machinist to come an' fix them crusher," some one announced.

She wondered how they knew it, not realizing that the address on the letter, which they carefully examined after she had placed it in the hotel letter box, betrayed the nature of its contents. She wondered how they were so intimately acquainted with her affairs, and she had an impulse to laugh when some one gravely announced, "I always did crave to see a queen. I cut out her picture from the *Abeille de la Nouvelle Or-léans*, las' year, time she were queen of the Carnival. I sure am glad to see a queen."

"An' me," came in a chorus from the others on the gallery.

A youth with pomatumed hair and showy watch chain walked jauntily past the window and paused to gossip.

"Mees Maine 'ave came up the bayou, this morn-in'," some one informed him.

"So they tells me, over to the bank," he replied, shifting his toothpick to the other corner of his mouth.

"M'sieur Maine 'ave send to the city for a machinist," the first voice continued.

"He are throwin' away money," the young man answered pompously. "Every one say Espérance are mortgage' up to the handle, an' makin' open-kettle

sugar like they do, ain't goin' to get them out of debt. Not with sugar sellin' at no such price as they gets now. M'sieur Blaise are the h-only planter what will make money this year."

"Ah, là! là!" said one of his hearers, "I peetee M'sieur Maine, Pierre; I surely peetee M'sieur Maine!"

"Tha's M'sieur Maine's own affairs," said Pierre. "He 'ave eat his white bread. He ain't got nothin' but black bread lef', I reckon," and he swaggered away with his hat cocked over one eye.

Monsieur Duval expectorated impressively and said, "Pierre Poisson figure to himself that he own Gole Mine because Modeste 'ave look at him out of them buttermilk eye of hern; but she ain't goin' to marry Pierre — excep' as a las' drawin'. She plan to marry M'sieur Ronal', or M'sieur Maine, or Meester Sutton. Ef they fails her, an' ef she ain't got no hopes in the city, then she might take Pierre — not otherwise."

There was a chorus of affirmatives, for, though they might stand in awe of Catherine's hauteur as belonging to her station, they resented it in Modesta, who, as they said, "are jes' as Cajan as we-alls."

"Ole man Poisson vow five dollar to St. Anthony fer stoppin' the high water 'fore it reach Zelinka's place," some one announced.

"Five dollar!" another ejaculated; "he cain't pay that much. Two would 'ave ben enough. 'Tain't no use vowin' more'n you kin pay — some folks is so rash with the Saints."

There was a difference of opinion on this subject, and M'sieur Duval said, "Miss Delicia vow twelve candle ef her house don' get wash erway, an' now she regret. She say six would 've ben enough, an' Père Ignace tell her she 'ave got to keep her vow. Ef she don' keep her vow, nex' time 'twon't do no good to vow twenty-four. She was *mad!* But he wouldn' let her off."

There was no mistaking the little red brick bank, a short distance down the street, but when, after dinner, Catherine came out of her room, M'sieur Duval insisted on escorting her ceremoniously to the door of the hotel and pointing it out. The occupants of the chairs gazed silently upon the slender, city girl as she walked down the street, where a procession of cows was filing past, chewing open-mouthed, swinging their heads and lazily sweeping away the flies. The children playing on the shady side of the street paused and stared.

Check in hand, she approached the window of the paying teller, and glanced about her. A man who had just finished writing, dipped the pen into the ink and offered it to her, saying, with a soft, gentle intonation, "It is of the worst, but better than none." There was a quality in the voice that caught her attention, and as she glanced at him, she was struck by the refinement of his face. She had an impression he wished to say something more to her, so vivid was the expression of his dark eyes. In signing her own name, she accidentally glanced at his: "Évariste Ledoux."

Where had she heard that name before? She could not remember.

The mules were to be freshly shod, and after resting as usual at the hotel stable, were to return in the evening to Espérance; but it was a part of Catherine's outing that, after certain necessary purchases in the primitive little shops, she was to return to Espérance in the Mail Boat, on this its first trip so far down the bayou.

The boat proved to be a long, low, covered craft, surrounded by an open deck and divided into two compartments; one for freight, the other for passengers. In the freight compartment were packages of all sorts and blocks of ice to be delivered at the various plantations. Behind the ice at the stern of the boat, there was a young bull that bellowed and strained wrathfully at its rope, making futile efforts to charge into the compartment reserved for human passengers.

As Catherine stepped in through the low doorway, a black-eyed girl sprang up from the bench where she was sitting, on the shady side, and insisted on giving up her place. Catherine remembered seeing her at Modesta Blaise's reception. How long ago it seemed! And what changes had taken place since then! In a corner opposite, were a young man and his childish looking wife, with their huge, brown baby which frowned at the company with piercing black eyes. The young girl seated herself beside the family party and divided her time between talking to the baby and glancing curiously at Catherine. In another corner

sat a large, clean-looking colored woman of a bright ginger-cake color. The front of the cabin was of glass, and here, on a high stool, sat the Captain of the little craft.

As the boat was about to start, there was a slight commotion and an old woman in a clean, gray calico dress and black sunbonnet, stepped down the bank, leading a man who carried a heavy cane in his hand. Several of the men who were standing around waiting to see the boat start, took hold of the newcomers, apparently with the purpose of helping them, and as the two reached the narrow side deck there were cries (in French) of "Look out! Take care!" Then, as the man moved on and felt his way carefully and with the assistance of others, to the front deck, there were exclamations of "There! All right!" and other expressions of relief. Some one handed the old woman her bag of black oil cloth. She laid it on the floor of the cabin, and when both Catherine and the black-eyed girl offered her their places, she declined with a smile of sunny sweetness. Seating herself on her bag, she took off her sunbonnet and fanned herself with it, gazing meanwhile at her fellow passengers with the frank astonishment of infancy and old age.

At a sudden outburst of bellowing, Catherine looked anxiously in the direction of the bull, and a lady at her right said, "He enrages himself a little on account of the voyage, but he cannot escape. He is safe prisoner."

Her eyes were intensely black and her eyebrows were

so dark they looked as if they were penciled; the more so that her hair was gray. As the wind blew in at the open door, it tossed her curls all about her face. She wore an ornate black silk dress which Catherine suspected of being the work of Miss Delicia; and her towering hat covered with plumes was evidently a creation of the village milliner. As she brushed back her curls with an impatient gesture, the dimpled, black-eyed girl sprang up exclaiming: "But, Maman, your hair is so gay!"

"But yes," the lady acknowledged regretfully, "I have always had the very gay hair."

The girl stroked back her mother's "gay" locks, fastened them with side-combs, and reseated herself beside the baby.

"But that was a beautiful fête," she said to the company at large, "and to-morrow will be the procession. I desired to stay, but my papa insist upon my return."

"You have a very mean papa," said the colored woman in a deep, pleasant voice.

"You know who is my papa?" asked the girl.

"Yes, I know," the woman answered. "He is M'sieur Léonce LeBreton. My sister live to your place, an' tha's where I'm goin' to visit, right now. You have a very mean papa. I know; me."

"No," interrupted Madam LeBreton dispassionately, "he is not mean; he is stric'. I desire her to stay to the *Fête Champêtre*, but her papa miss her too much. He didn't do that for meanness."

The old woman smiled understandingly at Catherine, and this attracted the attention of Madam LeBreton, who said, in French, "Are you not Madam Dulac?"

"*Oui, Madame,*" the old woman answered.

Madam LeBreton turned to Catherine and said in an undertone, "She begs." Then, with a manner of perfect equality in which there was no touch of condescension, she resumed, "You were at the *Fête*, I think?"

"*Oui, Madame,* and," (always speaking in French) "before that, I spent a week in Badeauville."

"You went there to beg?" Madam LeBreton asked, and again, with perfect dignity and composure, the beggar-woman assented.

"And where do you stay now?" Madam LeBreton questioned further.

"At Garlenda."

"Ah? The place of Madam Sylvain Durand?"

"*Non, Madame,*" the old woman replied in her calm, gentle voice. "It is the other Garlenda; the plantation of M'sieur Evariste Ledoux."

The boat had been stopping at the various plantations to put off the mail, to leave the ice and various packages, and to permit a constantly varying stream of passengers to come and go. And now the baby and its parents, together with the resentful bull, left the boat.

At this landing two young girls got on; one, a tall, serious looking blonde in blue, the other a tiny brunette in vivid pink. They entered the cabin very modestly

with a murmured, "*Bon jour, Mesdames,*" followed by a surprised, "It is thou, Célimène?"

"Thou didst not stay for the procession?" the brunette questioned in astonishment.

"Alas! Papa send for me!" Célimène answered. "And thou? Why didst thou not stay?"

The tiny brunette sighed dramatically. "We are desolate to depart," she explained, "but our papa too!" She made a gesture of despair.

"But Clélie," interposed the blonde, "thou knowest, we asked to visit Noémie, and it is the Mail Boat is in fault to run so far only once a week. For that we must not blame papa. And after, comes the grinding, and it goes without saying we cannot go then."

Madam LeBreton resumed her questioning of the beggar woman by asking where she was going.

"I am going to Petit Bocage," Madam Dulac replied.

"Ah? The plantation of M'sieur Telesford Deléry?"

"*Oui, Madame.*"

"You go to beg?"

"*Non, Madame,* I go to visit my daughter. I have not seen her, it is a year. I would not go now, but that Mam'zelle, M'sieur Évariste's daughter, give me the money."

"His daughter?" Madam LeBreton began, but was interrupted by the prolonged whistling of the boat as it drew up at Belize Plantation. She rose and followed by Célimène and by the colored woman, after

bidding the remaining passengers a ceremonious "Adieu," left them.

From Belize Plantation to Petit Bocage, the two sisters whispered together, and Madame Dulac gazed about her. She then rose and with a polite, "*Bon Soir, Mesdemoiselles,*" went out on to the deck and waited for her son.

There was the same little excitement in getting him ashore as when he came aboard, and when they had reached the road, Madam Dulac, carrying the oil cloth bag on her shoulder, turned and smiled at Catherine. Several children came running from an unpainted cabin at the roadside, and their mother, walking with swift, lithe step, paused to kiss the blind man in passing, then, holding out her arms, clasped the old woman to her breast, stroked back the hair, and stooping, covered the wrinkled face with kisses.

XXVIII

THE following week the grinding began, and immediately the slow-going, quiet life of the plantation assumed a business-like routine. The days and nights were divided into watches; there was a constant going and coming, an almost feverish anxiety as to the yield, the sucrose, the action of the machinery, the amount of fuel necessary for making the grinding, the relative freshness and brackishness of the bayou water which must be used. There were no regular hours for family meals, as Fergus and Ronald were obliged to take turns with Placide Chauvin in superintending the work, and each became a law unto himself as regarded his daily life.

Coming in one evening for a bite of supper, Ronald found Catherine in the pantry making sandwiches. For a full minute he stood in the doorway gazing at her before he voiced his astonishment.

"Of all things!" he exclaimed. "Catherine Maine making sandwiches. Where did you learn how?"

"Marcelline taught me," she replied, with manifest pleasure. "Come and have some."

Dropping into a chair at the end of the table, he helped himself.

"Tired?" she asked, glancing at him as she spoke. His athletic form was relaxed in an attitude of weariness. The candle light shining on his blond hair showed the ripples that he detested, and the strong, firm mouth grown stern in the past months, but showing humor and sweetness in certain lines.

"It's ridiculous," he answered her question, "but I am tired. You know, I've always been something of a sleepy-head, and as yet I have not quite adjusted myself to these three-hour watches. I don't see how Fergus stands them."

"He says you insisted on taking the hardest watch. That it's ten times as hard to go to bed right after supper and get up at midnight as it is to sit up late and then sleep in the morning."

"I suppose it's all a matter of habit," he replied. "Those are good sandwiches, Catherine. Are you making them for your supper?"

"For *our* supper, and I'm going to send some over to the sugar house for Fergus." Delighted to find him astonished at her efficiency, she began setting one end of the table, moving back and forth between the ice box, the wire safe, and the table; placing cold meat, a pitcher of creamy milk, and a plate of sandwiches before him.

He watched her, moving about, and presently asked: "Do you remember that picture in the Louvre of the angels in the kitchen?"

"No," she replied, pausing knife in hand preparatory to cutting more bread. "Who was the artist?"

"I don't remember. The picture hangs either among the Primitive Italians, or in the *Grande Galerie*. It's a funny old thing of angels doing kitchen work: sweeping, washing dishes, and all that. You reminded me of it, floating around that way with the pitcher of milk in your hands."

"I've learned to do a lot of things," she observed with pride; "I'm learning to cook. I can make dripped coffee, and *jambalaya*, and corn pone, and *pain perdu*, and lots of things."

"Have you learned to make corn meal mush and sassafras tea?" he asked. "Those are the stand-bys of the natives out here."

She looked questioningly at him. What did he mean by his observation in regard to the natives? Did he mean to insinuate that she was going to cast in her lot with them? And as she stood looking at him, he raised his eyes. As if for the first time, he was struck by the clear pallor of her face from which her dark hair swept back in a waving mass. Age would not dim her beauty, he thought. Her hair, when gray, would bring into still greater splendor the dark eyes with their slender brows, and the purity of her clear-cut features. For a moment, the two looked at each other, both thinking of their last interview in the city. Then her eyes fell and she resumed her work.

"Why didn't you let Chauvin take that hard watch?" she asked.

"He's an older man than I, and probably not as strong. He's never had the advantage of golf and

football and rowing. If there's any merit in systematic exercise, I ought to be able to carry the heaviest load."

"Is the sap testing well?" she asked.

"No. The sucrose doesn't test as it should. The weather's too hot."

"Then why in the world don't they wait for cooler weather? If they need frost, why don't they wait for it?"

"They dare not. Sometimes there isn't frost all winter long."

"Oh, but that's so unusual. It's like carrying a lightning-rod so as not to be hit in a thunder-storm."

He laughed. "I'm afraid the device would fail," he observed. "But you know the cane is a forced crop here and experience has taught the planters that it's safest not to wait, for fear of a freeze catching them."

"They're the stupidest lot!" she commented. "Hard-headed as blind mules, all of them."

"Not all," he corrected her. "Not Placide. I confess he doesn't scintillate in conversation, but, for a man who has never seen anything outside of his native parish, he's surprisingly intelligent. Can you imagine living to his age without ever being on a railroad, or seeing a street car, or a building more than two stories high? I've half a mind to take him with me after the grinding."

"Are you going to take a vacation?" she asked with apparent indifference, but in reality with a feeling

of apprehension. She shrank from the loneliness of Espérance if he or Fergus should go away even for a short time.

"Not a vacation in the sense of a rest. I'm going on business."

She wished he would say more, but he ate his supper in silence as if buried in thought. Why need he be so secretive? Why couldn't he trust her and tell her something of his affairs? Surely he must know she was starving for news; for a change of any sort. But, repressing as best she could her impatience, she merely said, "It will be nice to have a change."

"That depends on what the change may be."

"Oh, any change."

"There are worse places in the world than Espérance," he observed. "I don't believe in 'flying from the ills I have to others that I know not of.'"

"I never realized how I loved to travel until my chances were all past," she said.

"I hope your chances will come again," he replied in his deep, pleasant voice.

"Do you believe it, or just hope it?"

"I hope and believe it," he answered; "that is, if my trip is successful."

"It concerns us all, then?"

"Part of it does. I shouldn't think of going off junketing until there was some relief out here. Then, perhaps —"

"Then we'll all go?" she finished his sentence.

"Yes, we'll all go — if we wish."

"We do 'wish,'" she declared. "So why can't we? "

"Because *we* can't afford it."

"But you can? "

Raising his eyes again, he met her questioning look. "A part of my errand concerns me personally," he replied, "although I don't mean to make a mystery of it. As regards your share, I didn't wish to tell you because I feared you would oppose it."

"And yet you were going to do it? "

"Yes."

"Does Fergus know? "

"Yes."

"And approve? "

"Of course. Otherwise, I should not plan to do it."

"Don't the affairs of this plantation concern me? And haven't I a right to know what's going on as well as you and Fergus? Or are you so convinced of the heaven-ordained incapacity of woman that you think I must, permanently, be treated as a child? "

"I didn't wish to tell you," he replied in a reluctant tone, "because we feel compelled to investigate something in regard to Marc Sutton — and I feared you would blindly champion him."

"And yet you were planning to do it! " Her tone was cutting.

"For your good; yes."

"Don't you think it would be more sensible — and more honorable — to let me have a voice in your projects to benefit me? "

"I knew you'd take that tone, Catherine," he said, "and as it is a matter of business that seemed to Fergus and me to be imperatively necessary, we decided not to let your prejudice in his favor work you harm."

"*We* decided. Did you or Fergus first discover the delinquency of Marc Sutton? "

"I did."

She laughed slightly, and he reddened. "Make a pet of him if you wish," he said. "I'm not going to let him ruin *Espérance* if I can help it."

"Why do you accuse me — or at least imply — that I 'make a pet' of him? What have I done to warrant such an insult? "

"Have you forgotten how fiercely you championed him the evening he took supper here? And can't you see what a devoted friend he has proved himself, after all his protestations? He has been out in the country again and again and has never come near you. He no longer needs you. You may be right in considering him an evangelist and an anchorite —"

"I don't think he need be either an evangelist or an anchorite to be ordinarily trustworthy," she interrupted.

"Neither do I," said Ronald. "But the difference between you and me is that I don't consider him any one of the three. I do wish, for your own sake, you could be made to see —"

"I do see he is very intimate at Gold Mine," she interjected, "and that you are jealous."

"Don't be unjust, Catherine," he urged, still trying to control his temper. "You championed him —"

"When you championed the Blaisses," she again interrupted. "I have had plenty of solitude in which to think over the situation."

"I never championed them beyond saying that you were needlessly scornful toward Modesta."

"Of course," she replied, "I was in the wrong. You thought she would be such a delightful companion for me. So 'lovely' and all that."

"I thought it imprudent to insult our influential neighbors. But I don't see what that has to do with Marc Sutton."

"Don't you? Then I'll tell you. Because of his intimacy at Gold Mine, you became jealous and exaggerated my interest in him."

"As you did mine in Modesta Blaise."

"Perhaps I did; but you have such a lovery way when you are talking with girls that, naturally, we —"

"'We'!" he interrupted. "Who are 'we'? I'm sure Fergus never said such a thing. You may have thought it—but I'd be ashamed to think I had a 'lovery' way. You might just as well call me a disgusting fool as to say —" He stopped in speechless indignation. "Why, Catherine," he resumed sternly, "how can you be so unreasonable?"

"'Unreasonable'!" she repeated. "Was it unreasonable to see how you took up for her that night at our 'cunning little sugar house'? And at that awful party they gave —" She was on the point of telling

what she heard Modesta say about him in the conservatory, but checked herself.

"Oh, yes," he broke in stormily, "the time you were flirting with Tom on the side gallery. I remember —"

"And the day she called here," Catherine went on, "you fairly had your arm around her pony's neck, you were so crazy about her."

"Catherine Maine!" he ejaculated. "You might as well call me —"

"Now! Now! Now!" she interrupted. "I'm not calling you anything. I'm only saying you were perfectly bewitched with that girl from the very first moment you saw her. You said she was lovely that day she stopped to insult me at the gate."

"When did she ever insult you?"

"Every time she had a chance."

"I never saw her insult you. You certainly made her bite the dust."

"Oh, yes; I was in the wrong. Always! You may think her perfectly heavenly if you like, but I don't care to lower myself —"

"No," he agreed sarcastically, for he was now as angry as she, although his tone remained steady, "You wouldn't lower yourself for the world."

"You've a perfect right to be as flirtatious as you like," she continued. "By all means, marry the girl; it's no business of mine."

"Flirtatious!" he repeated. "Look out for the windows in your own house, Catherine. What do you

think of yourself — trifling equally with a poor, ignorant fisherman or a hardened roué? It's all the same to you; just another scalp at your belt. I don't blame Tom Ogers for saying you led him on. I thought —"

"Of course! Of course!" she flung back, "you'd have thought I was flirting with old Monsieur Poisson if I'd ever spoken to him. I suppose you think I'm secretly leading Placide Chauvin on. And you were off with Miss Blaise when you forgot about our birthday supper."

"Forgot!" he exclaimed. "I didn't do anything of the sort."

"Then that's all the worse, if you deliberately went off and didn't care enough to come." She had never meant to speak of that again, but now in her wrath she had inadvertently referred to it.

"I did care," he said, rising and looking sternly down at her. "I couldn't help being late, the automobile skidded so."

"Well, you knew it would skid when you started. It was raining, and yet you couldn't deny yourself the pleasure of a ride. It seemed so childish of you to be so crazy for a ride."

He made an impatient gesture. "If that isn't just like a woman!" he exclaimed. "To prove that I am flirtatious, you say I'm childishly crazy for a ride. I'll tell you what I tried to explain the morning after our birthday."

"I haven't the slightest interest in your reasons for going riding with Miss Blaise."

"I am well aware of that," he replied. "You have not left me in ignorance as to your sentiments in regard to me, but before we part, I am going to set myself right in this one particular. I went to Bergerac to get you a birthday present."

"Oh, Ronald!" she ejaculated, softening instantly and regretting what she had said. "You ought not to have tried to get me anything."

"I did get it," he replied.

"What is it?" she demanded eagerly.

"Do you remember that round, antique mirror that used to hang over your desk? Do you remember, it was convex and framed so quaintly?"

"Remember it!" she exclaimed, and there rose before her mental vision a vast, luxurious room and the reflection of her own figure crowned and sceptred as she saw it the night Fergus told her of the impending failure.

"George Burbank bought that mirror in an antique shop on Royal street," Ronald explained, "and May recognized it. She knew you prized it and he wrote offering it to me. They were afraid to write directly to you for fear of calling up painful memories."

"And you've had it all this time," she said slowly.

"No," he confessed with evident embarrassment, "I haven't it."

"Ronald North!" she cried, passionately, "you didn't give my mirror to that girl?"

The question was an accusation, and in his indignation at her suspecting him of such a possibility, he

would not clear himself and confess what had really happened, viz., that in his anger at her refusing to hear his explanation, he recklessly threw her beautiful, valued, mirror into the bayou. The truth was bad enough. He could not brook her suspicions.

"I'm glad I didn't give you the handkerchiefs I made for your birthday," she declared.

"You made me handkerchiefs?" he asked, relenting, and ready now to explain.

But she answered with studied insolence, "Oh, yes, I made you some, but I changed my mind about giving them to *you*."

"To *me*," he repeated, misunderstanding, as she had meant he should. "Have you given them to anyone?"

"Perhaps."

"May I ask to whom?"

"Perhaps to Tom Ogers, and perhaps to Jacques Lirette." She half regretted her words as soon as they were spoken, but the thought of her mirror in the possession of Modesta Blaise had goaded her beyond all bounds of prudence.

"Catherine," he said, and his voice was deep and steady, "you have brought me to a decision."

The door opened, and Ananias entered. With trembling hands, Catherine wrapped the sandwiches and placed them in the basket, while Ronald stood waiting as inexorable as fate. Outside, the garden lay bathed in the peaceful moonlight, and the lights of the sugar

house, reflected in long, rippling threads across the surface of the bayou gave a fantastic semblance of stage scenery. The voices of men and women piling cane on to the carrier in the cane shed came through the still air, now singly, now in chorus. They were singing a wild, improvised fugue in which a piercing treble was answered by a deep, musical bass.

"Move, Danuel, move," shrilled the treble.

"Move, Danuel, move," responded the bass; "move to the other shore."

A high, passionate falsetto exhorted: "Lay your burdens down, Danuel."

"Burdens, burdens," boomed the bass, and in a great flood of harmony: "Move to the other shore."

Ananias went out, leaving the door open and Ronald, his face marble-white, said, "I see my coming to *Espérance* was a mistake. You have misunderstood my motives. We need never reopen this subject." He paused, pressing his lips firmly together as if they might betray his agitation, then added, "When the grinding is ended, I shall go, and unless you ask me to do so, I will never come back."

"'Ask' you?" she repeated. "*Ask* you! I'd die first," and turning, she left him.

"What am I waiting for?" she questioned herself; "staying on and on at *Espérance*. Every day like every other day, just dragging me toward my grave." As in a lightning flash she saw the life that Tom was offering her. With his wealth and influence, he could

give her everything. Why should she not accept it?
What was holding her back? A sense of duty?

In the thick darkness of her room she stood thinking.

XXIX

CATHERINE was destroying old letters; tearing them in pieces and throwing them back of the ornamental board front which closed the empty fireplace during the eight months of summer. There were notes, invitations, disconnected reminders of her former life — how long ago it all seemed! Here was one from Marc Sutton beginning, "My queen!" She tossed it away with the others, and just then a warm breath from the window stirred the mass as with a sigh of regret.

Turning, she drew down the sash and as she did so, her eyes fell on a withered vine at the foot of a tree near-by; the beautiful, wild vine Jacques Lirette brought the day she went to Bergerac. How disappointed and mortified he must have been to find her absent and to be confronted by — whom? She did not know. She could only conjecture. Poor boy! She would explain, the next time she saw him, that she had tried to save the plant and was sorry it died.

A knock at the open door roused her from her thoughts and Marcelline's voice inquired: "Does you want Pidgeon to thrash the pecan trees? 'Taint no use waitin' fer frost."

"Oh, yes," Catherine answered eagerly, snatching

up her garden hat and following into the side yard where she found Pidgeon already scrambling around among the branches and reaching out with a long pole to touch the outermost twigs. Marcelline, standing below, observed him with a warning exclamation of "Watch out! You has to be mighty keerless when you is tryin' to play squirr'l." Grumblingly, she picked up the nuts as they fell and tossed them into a basket, saying as she did so. "'Tain't scurcely wuth the trouble er thrashin' the trees this year. Anyhow, this ain't no good year for nothin'. The cane ain't yieldin' like it ought, the hens ain't layin', the calves is all bulls, an' the puccons ain't wuth pickin' up."

"There ought to be good pecans in this part of the country," said Catherine, gazing anxiously up at Pidgeon.

"Shore, they is good puccons in these parts," Marcelline replied, taking two of the nuts and cracking them in the palm of her hand. "Down to Malabar they was trees had nuts bigger'n my thumb. I reckon the high water kilt them. Tha's where M'sieur Évariste Ledoux got his trees; right thar to Malabar — an' every one know what fine puccons he use' to have."

"Monsieur Évariste Ledoux!" Catherine repeated. "Who is Monsieur Évariste Ledoux? I've heard the name, but I can't remember where."

"He live up the bayou, a good piece above Bergerac. while his paw was livin,' they use' to live to Beau-Rivage, down by Malabar. Hit got kinder ruinated, time er the big storm a few years back. Sence then,

they has raised sheeps on them salt marshes, but I reckon all the sheeps got drowned, time er the high water. M'sieur Évariste got kinder disheartened, 'case his paw die, and Miss Hortense wouldn't marry him, so he an' his maw went up to Garlenda to live."

"He wanted to marry Miss Hortense?" Catherine asked.

"He shore did, an' he stood her friend when nobody ain't believe her tale, an' he want to marry her, spite of everything. He war the onliest one what always stand by her."

"I thought her brother did."

"Yas'm, he kinder did. He wouldn't let the young Madam turn her out of doors. But you know how it are, Miss Catrine. When there's trouble, some folks walks a mile the other way — an' he shore did stay a heap of time in the fiel's. But M'sieur Évariste always stan' by her, an' he want to take the li'l gal when Miss Hortense die — but his maw were a turr'ble crabbish ole lady, an' she were dead agin her. Dead sot. She wouldn't listen to no good talk 'bout Miss Hortense, ner she wouldn't so much as listen to her name. No Ma'am! "

"Whom did he marry?" Catherine asked.

"Him? He niver marry no one. No, Ma'am; not him! He live up yonder with his maw, twel she die, not so long ago, neither. She suttingly driv' him with a stiff bit. But he ain't say nothin'. She were a kinder miser-fied ole lady, an' she kep' the money in her own hand, an' she buy Belle Alliance an' Holley

Glen, an' I reckon she'd have own' all the land 'twix Garlanda an' the Gulf effen the Lord hadn't a remem-ber her all of a suddint an' snatch her away 'fore she could do any more mischief."

"Who is it they call his daughter?" Catherine asked.

Marcelline stopped in her search for pecans and looked inquiringly at her Mistress. "I ain't nuver year talk 'bout no darter," she said, "ner I don't believe he've got one, neither."

"Was he Félicie Trosclair's godfather?" Catherine asked.

"I reckon he must er ben," Marcelline replied, looking surprised.

"Yes, Ma'am, he were," Pidgeon piped down from the tree.

"Sure, he must er ben," Marcelline repeated, but, not being deeply interested in the subject, she said no more and withdrew shortly to the kitchen.

Pidgeon came down from the tree, but Catherine was still picking up pecans when Fergus and Ronald appeared at the gate, talking earnestly. They walked slowly, so absorbed that, at first, they did not notice her and she suspected rightly that they were discussing something not meant for her ears.

"I have distrusted Sutton for a long time," Ronald was saying, "and I think I have proof now that he was the one who suggested the scheme."

"You may be wrong," Fergus remonstrated gently. "Don't decide against him until you have made fur-

ther investigation. Besides, it may be true that the gas pocket is on the Gold Mine side of the line."

"No, Fergus, it isn't. It's just a scheme to rob Espérance of what may be its most valuable asset."

"The most valuable asset is the crop, Ronald. Drilling in this sandy soil is too uncertain and too costly for us to consider. But the crop is something that affects the whole community. The pocket might enrich us — if we neglected the crop, we should be doing wrong to all this part of the parish."

"You're like Louis XII," Ronald said, smiling.

"How so?"

"A true Father of the People. Don't you remember, he said he'd rather his people should have plenty of silver in their pockets than that he should have some gold? I think it was Louis XII, wasn't it?"

"I don't remember; but about that position Burbank mentioned. What is your objection to it?"

"It will bring me into contact with Banks. In fact, I should be placed over him, and I should be forced to discharge him. He'd think I was doing it out of spite — and I hate to be put in such a position; but I know that's cowardly of me. Burbank says they'll wait two or three weeks for my decision."

"You've practically made it, haven't you?"

"Yes. I hate to leave before your relations with Blaise are more settled. There's no doubt he has been deeply hurt by Catherine's attitude toward Modesta. I think he hoped great things in a social way from their becoming intimate. The girl's pretty and at-

tractive enough, and, naturally, he's inordinately proud of her — his only child."

"Naturally. I'm sorry Catherine is so prejudiced against her."

"It's lamentable!" Ronald declared. At this moment, he noticed Catherine standing under the pecan tree, and, as always in catching an unexpected glimpse of her, was struck by her charm. It smote him with a pang. "I love her yet," he thought, and scorned himself for his weakness.

From the branches of the tree hung long festoons of moss through which the sunlight filtered upon her, dappling her with light and shadow. As aloof as a wood nymph, she moved about, her face turned from them. He wondered if she would move through life, this way; solitary and apart from her fellow beings. What loneliness she was preparing for herself! She, who loved no one in the world but Fergus — her unpractical, visionary brother. Yes. Ronald saw it clearly. He, the despised Ronald, must for their sakes, leave them and accept that position where he could provide for them. He must let them believe that he was deserting them after all these years of companionship. It was the only way to save Espérance from failure — as fail it must, unless some one performed a miracle in their behalf.

"Fergus," Catherine said, coming toward them basket in hand, "see how few pecans there were on that tree. Haven't they a tree over at the Chauvins'?"

Ronald was on the point of saying that there were

several. That the tree shading the side gate was a pecan, but, as she had not glanced at him, he refrained from speaking. She, for her part, looked steadily at Fergus as if Ronald were not present. He had said he did not wish to reopen the conversation. Very well; he need not. So far as she was concerned, he no longer existed.

"I think they have one," Fergus hazarded.

"Isn't that one by the gate a pecan?"

"I think it is."

She walked up the steps, her hand slipped through Fergus's arm, while Ronald followed in silence.

"I'm going over to Miss Victorine's," she said, "when you go back to the sugar house. I want to have a barrel of pecans. We always used to have a barrelful in our store room in the city, didn't we?"

"I believe we did," Fergus agreed.

"Very well. It's ridiculous not to have them out here where they grow."

"Certainly, you must have them," Fergus reiterated. "But shan't I see about it for you?"

"No, I want the walk," and she went singing to her room, not having vouchsafed Ronald one glance.

As she walked with Fergus towards Miss Victorine's, she no longer felt so proud of herself for wounding Ronald. After all, he had had provocation, and she was too much of a coquette to wish any act to be final. Possibly, he might not "come back" even if she did "ask him," she reflected.

Miss Victorine emerged from the hen house as Cath-

erine entered the gate, and pausing only to lock the door — which she would not have forgotten to do even though the earth yawned to swallow her — the old lady hastened to meet the mistress of *Espérance*. Very, very willingly, she assured Catherine, they would supply her with as many pecans as she wished. What was theirs was hers, the old lady assured her, speaking in parables as it were. Catherine, on the other hand, fully believed that what was theirs was hers, and accepted the assurances without too exaggerated a gratitude. Several times, she noticed that the old lady was gazing searchingly at her — but she was accustomed to receiving more than a passing glance and did not attach importance to Miss Victorine's look.

"And," the old lady added, "my Placide will bring you some good ones — but admirable, magnificent ones; paper shells — from Belize when he go up yonder to visit his pretended: *Célimène LeBreton*."

"*Célimène LeBreton*!" Catherine exclaimed, genuinely surprised by the news. "I congratulate you, Miss Victorine."

"I 'ave the honor to announce it," Miss Victorine said solemnly. "God is good, Mees Catrine. He see how I grieve for my little Solange — with the angels, it is now thirty year. He see that I desire, that I have need of a daughter, and He send me *Célimène*, who onderstand chicken like no one on the bayou; who cook an' sew, an' mend, and who love my Placide."

Catherine was searching in her imagination for

words adequate to this astonishing situation, when a clear, barytone voice was heard, gaily singing, and turning they saw Père Ignace approaching from the direction of Gold Mine. He was carrying a gun on his shoulder, and his two hounds, Quin and Boulee (Queen and Bully) were slinking at his heels.

"There is joy to Gole Mine to-night," he announced from a distance.

"To Gole Mine?" Miss Victorine exclaimed. " 'Ave Meester Sutton return?"

"Ah, bah!" said Père Ignace lightly. "Where are the rose of last year? It is no Meester Sutton: another blossom in his place. This are a *grand parti*. But *grand!*"

"But 'ow could that be?" Miss Victorine demanded. "Ef it are not Meester Sutton: Pierre Poisson are no *parti*. She play with him like a cat, but he is not —"

"Ah, là, là!" Père Ignace interrupted. "It is not for Cajan marriage them lights twinkle through the trees, an' the family eat their New Year dinner in anticipate. But I tell you it is a *parti!* It is one who reside in Vashington. Who holler 'Allo' in the telephone every morning with the President. Who h-ad-vise heem an' say, 'Geeve them sugar planter a tariff on their sugar, you hear me, hein?' An' the President promise what he demand."

Miss Victorine burst out with an unexpected torrent of indignation. "That ain't just, Père Ignace!" she exclaimed. "They has did their possible against all the bayou. An' that Modeste, makin' noses at all

the parish, makin' a slave of our Félicie, laughin' in the face of the bayou — she will foam to the President? *Non!* Justice do not h-exist."

"Have a care, Mees Victorine," Père Ignace warned her. "Justice do h-exist, even though we 'ave not always the pleasure to see our enemy in purgatory — onless we accompany heem; which we do not desire, hein? "

"It is true," she acknowledged. "We are not permit to behole our enemy in purgatory. But that Modeste, that serpent in the herbs, with a face as round as the Tower of Babylon — she will foam to the wife of the President? It is too much! "

"Have you heard the name of the *parti*? " Catherine asked, knowing full well beforehand what it must be.

"Bang," said Père Ignace. "No; that don't sound right. Bang? Bang? " he repeated tentatively: then, his memory coming to the rescue, "Bank! Bank are the name. A very distinguish' diplomate. There is so much joy to Gole Mine, the 'ouse will not contain."

Catherine made no comment, and for a moment all remained silent. That the wicked had been rewarded seemed so obvious there was no explaining it away.

As Catherine, after saying good-by to Miss Victorine, walked toward the bridge, accompanied by the priest, a softened haze rested on the fields where some laborers were burning a pile of trash. In the gathering twilight, the flames flared and danced fantastically, throwing into high relief a group of children

from the quarters who were "playing lady" on the bank of the bayou. Stopping their game, they watched with bright, observant eyes as the two approached.

Seeing the little, kinky heads with horns of "wrapped" hair that gave them a demoniacal look, Père Ignace said, "Good evening, my children."

As if drilled to do so, the little figures instantly rose upright, and the little heads ducked in a courtesy as the children replied with the regulation formula of "Good evenin', Père Ignace, Good evenin', white Miss."

"How well the church is getting on," Catherine said, looking up at the spire. "If only you had Noré Pinel to help now with these repairs."

"Yes," he agreed, "it is a peety he are not here. An' I have search in vain among the paper of the parish. I fear he exist only in imagination. Some of the paper will interes' you very much, Mees Catrine."

"Won't you come to dinner with us to-morrow?" she begged, "and bring the papers?"

"With pleasure, yes," he replied.

"And you will invite Miss Delicia for me, won't you?" she added.

"With your permission, no," he said. "These paper are not for the perusal of the bayou. An' my seester Delicia — she are good; she fulfil her *vow* — but for a promise, a simple promise, she have a long forget. I remind her, 'Thou didst promise not to tell,' an' she ease her conscience by the reply: 'Ah,

bah! why ask me to promise for a trifle? It did not importe — that secret.' And when the bayou enrage itself for what she have reveal — I need not explain, hein, why it is bes' to invite my seester another time? "

Catherine smiled, remembering a parish quarrel of which she had heard rumors. "Very well," she said. "Then I shall expect you to-morrow, and Miss Delicia some other time."

The sunset flamed in a sky of burnished copper against which the cypress trees lifted their branches. A lugger with a vast expanse of crimson sail that seemed to reflect the tints of the setting sun, glided slowly down the bayou. A man standing at the prow, raised a conch-shell to his lips and blew three long, wailing blasts. How well she remembered the first time she saw that statuesque form. Enveloped in the evening glow, the graceful boy with dark, silken hair, a red handkerchief knotted about his throat, took on a look of fantastic beauty. She half wished she had never known him. Better to picture him in her imagination as this beautiful, elfish being, remote from her world, untouched by her cruel kindness, than to have to reproach herself, as she should, so long as life lasted, with the knowledge that she had wounded the gentlest, loveliest creature that ever lived. His face was turned away. She knew that his eyes were searching for her. Standing perfectly still, scarcely daring to breath for fear of attracting attention, she watched the boat sweeping through the open bridge. It glided on, growing fainter and fainter, fading into the gathering twi-

light, now a gleam as a ray touched the sail, now a shadow among the trees, now a distant flash of coral flame. Then it was gone, and unknowingly, she had looked her last on Jacques Lirette.

XXX

ON that same evening, Marc Sutton, in his luxurious apartment in Washington, was looking over certain papers. Everything had gone well with him. Without losing the confidence of the sugar planters who believed he was devoting himself to their interests, he had managed through Adolphus Banks to make friends with the advocates of free trade, and secretly to identify himself with them. He was in the position of a man who blindfolds the world and receives money in both hands. Yes, he was that rarest of human beings, a satisfied man. Of so obscure an origin that no one remembered when he came to New Orleans, he now considered himself the most influential man in the city. Furthermore, he had so involved Tobias Blaise that he was practically the owner of the richest bits of land in the parish; and he smiled complacently as he drew a mental sketch of the central sugar house which he would build as soon as he had leisure to attend to it. Of course, when Banks learned to what extent his prospective father-in-law had become entangled, he would try to save something for himself from the wreck, but Marc smiled at the thought of his futile struggles. With a word — with one single threat — he could silence Adolphus Banks. Further-

more, should need arise in order to make sure of the land, he would take Modesta away from Adolphus. He had no doubt of his ability to do so. Possibly, however, he might blindfold that dreamer, Fergus Maine, and marry Catherine. He thought with satisfaction of her presiding over his establishment. Furthermore, there was no need of haste. He could move at his leisure. Unconsciously, they were all working for him.

One thing he had overlooked, and that was the age-old fact that we cannot see ourselves as others see us. He did not know that by his cupidity and thinly-veiled contempt, he had given offence to Tobias Blaise, and he trusted so implicitly to the Cajan ignorance and inability to see through his plans that he failed to take proper precautions, and approached Dr. Bonvillain without realizing that he and Blaise, having ties of nationality and of life-long association, would naturally trust each other rather than a comparative stranger. So when he tried to breed distrust between them because he feared Bonvillain's adverse influence, he put them both on their guard. Furthermore, he tried to lead Bonvillain on to talk by making him drunk. There were certain points he wished to learn in regard to Blaise's title to Gold Mine, and he felt sure Dr. Bonvillain could tell him. Very willingly, Dr. Bonvillain got drunk, but it happened that he became more and more morose and taciturn with each succeeding glass, while Marc, drinking more than he intended, grew benign and confidential.

And so it came to pass that while Père Ignace was telling Catherine and Miss Victorine the wonderful piece of bayou gossip, and Marc Sutton, a thousand miles away, was smiling secretly to himself, Dr. Bonvillain and Tobias Blaise were talking confidentially together. They were on horse back, having ridden some distance down the bayou, to ensure no one's hearing.

"What I looks at is this," said Dr. Bonvillain. "Meester Marks come out here an' shine up to Destie, an' then he come to me, an' ax whether you is sure enough owner of Gole Mine, an' whether it were mortgage' to any one. You never show him no paper, hein?"

"No; I tole him I was lawful owner, an' that it weren't much in debt. And any how, wha's it to him? Ain't I tole you she's engage' to Adolphe Bank?"

"Well, tha's what I'm a-comin' to. Him, Bank, an' Marks is in cahoot. An' he don't want to marry Destie lessen they is sure about the property."

This frank statement was displeasing to Blaise's fatherly pride, and he answered in a surly tone, "I reckon he'd marry Destie without no plantation. You talk like she wa'n't good enough fer him or any other man."

"Tobias," said Bonvillain, "I ain't sayin' nothin' agin Destie. She's purty enough, an' she dress fine, an' she've got city ways — I ain't sayin' nothin' 'bout her, but I does say somethin' 'bout him. You remember Boggs?"

"What Boggs?"

"Reginal'."

"Course I remember Reginal' Boggs. He put up my name fer the St. Francis Club."

"Well, he come to Bergerac to visit his maw, an' I seen him when I went up yonder, yestiddy, an' tha's why I come over here to-day. He tole me suthin' about Mr. Marks."

"What about him?" Tobias asked.

"You needn't ter get mad with me, Tobe," Bonvillain said. "It ain't my affair. I ain't no sugar planter, but you-all trusted him so an' send him up yonder to fight fer your interes', an' what you reckon he done?"

"I dunno," Tobias growled.

"He fit agin your interes'. He's fer free sugar. He fit the tariff —"

"It's a lie!" Tobias exclaimed with such a volley of oaths that even Dr. Bonvillain, inured to that style of conversation, paused in astonishment.

"Quit you cussin', Tobe," he said, "an' don't you dast say lie to me."

"I ain't sayin' lie to you. I says Boggs lied."

"I ain't standin' up fer Boggs, but he say he kin prove every word, an' soon's he git the chanct, he's comin' down to show you his proof. But he tole me to come quick — to-day. He say, 'Caliste, this ain't no time fer foolin'. That man's got Tobe's wool pulled over his heyes, an' him an Bank'll git every arpent er land what he own away fum him, you mind.' An' so

I cum, an' all the thanks I gits is a good cussin' out. But they's another word I has to say, an' then good-by —"

"Don't be mad, Caliste, cain't you see I'm worried? "

"Yes, I sees it, an' I sees something you doesn't see. I sees you has had three years er crop failure and this are the wust. An' ef you tries to hang on to them mortgage note you is goin' to be like the nigger what got caught with his fist in the corn bin. Either he had to drap some er the corn, or he couldn't pull his fist outer the bin. You is got to drap something, er you lose all. How is you goin' to buy feed fer your stock? And how is you goin' to pay your niggers? An'—"

"Ef I hold on to them note, I'll be the richest man in this parish."

"Yes, an' the biggest fool ef they takes off the tariff and you is ruined. You take my hadvice, Tobe. You sell them note an' raise money to run Gole Mine. 'Tain't wuth your while to ruin yourself jes' to spite Mr. Maine."

"When he was president of the St. Francis Club —" Tobias began, but Caliste interrupted him.

"You've tole me all about that, Tobias, but what you want to do right now is to raise money. After that, you kin get into all the clubs this side er purgatory, fer all of me, but right now, you wants to shuck your corn an' get it in the bin. Besides —"

"Besides what? " Tobias asked suspiciously.

"You know what Marks tole me when he was drunk? "

"What? "

"He tole me Mr. Maine were out of the city when your name come up, and it was him, Marks, what kep' you out of the club. I promise' him I'd never tell an' we laughed an' was powerful frien'ly over it."

Tobias listened to this in silence, while his purple face and distorted features showed his inward agitation.

"Don't hexcite yourself, Tobe," Dr. Bonvillain warned him. "You'll hurt your spleen ef you stirs yourself up that way. Cool off an' take it easy. Mark'll bite his nails good an' plenty ef he find out you ain't in debt no more. An' you can trust Boggs. He's Cajan like me and you, and he ain't goin' to kiss your hand an' then turn round an' spit on your back. He says to me, 'You tell Tobe to get rid of Marks, quick.'"

"His name ain't Marks — it's Sutton."

"I don't keer ef it's Pichonque — what I says is, watch out."

As the two men sat, side by side, Bonvillain, in his nondescript clothing of a uniform dust color, his bushy beard and untrimmed hair of the same general hue, wore such an air of slovenly poverty that Tobias Blaise, the prospective millionaire, felt a sudden impulse of scorn toward his former playmate. After all, what had Bonvillain accomplished in life to warrant his coming and advising him, the owner of Gold Mine, in this

peremptory manner? And yet, knowing the fiery temper of his old friend, he dared not dismiss him too curtly.

"I'll ask Destie," he observed, turning his horse's head toward the field where, in the distance, they saw the men and women cutting cane. "She has a long reckonin' with Miss Maine, and I reckon, ef I let the Maines off too easy, she'll raise a big holler."

"You ain't lettin' them off. But it ain't wuth your while to ruin yehself just to get even with Miss Catrine. I reckon she ain't broke to harness very good, but she'll get her pace without no help fum you. I know it's hard to disappoint Destie. I'm a father myself, an' I know it's hard. I peetee you — but it pain me more to see you such a big fool you trusts —"

"Big fool yourself!" Tobias broke out. "What do you want to be takin' up fer the Maines fer?"

Dr. Bonvillain listened in open-mouthed astonishment. "Who's takin' up fer the Maines?" he demanded.

"You!" Tobias retorted, "and I want you to know right now, I don't trust nobody meddlin' in my affairs."

"All right," Bonvillain answered hotly, "but don't you holler fer me to come an' haul you out when you is stuck in the mud," and he galloped away in deep wrath.

XXXI

IGNORANT as always about matters of business, Catherine was unconcious of the widespread feeling of disappointment in regard to the yield of the cane, which was so tall that the roads leading through the fields were like tunnels in which a man on horseback was hidden from sight. Every one had prophesied a "bumper crop" and she did not realize that the great growth of the cane and its continued greenness made it the more unfit for grinding. Surely their debts would be paid this year, she thought, and then they could leave this place of exile and live once more in the world. It would be such a simple thing to cut adrift from all the perplexing entanglements out here —

Some one knocked, and turning from the window where she had been dreaming of the roseate future, she beheld Pidgeon standing in the doorway holding out a letter toward her.

"Dishyere are all what come to-day," he informed her, "scusin' what I lef' over yonder to the office."

The envelope was postmarked Newport, and was from Tom. Smilingly, she opened and began reading it. The first page was filled with accounts of Lady Fullerton and her beautiful daughter. Catherine's smile of amusement deepened. "Trying to make me

jealous," she thought. It was such a familiar trick of Tom's — it seemed almost childishly transparent. He ought to have known it could not deceive her. Turning the page, she read on:

"You know I've never seen a grinding. Won't you let me come down before it's finished? Besides, I have a special reason. I give you my word of honor I never meant really to harm any of you. I meant to frighten you a little and punish you a bit for flirting so outrageously with that Cajan boy, right before my face. I'll explain the business details to Fergus. No use bothering you with them. And don't let him persuade you that the bottom has dropped out of everything. It hasn't, and I can make everything right when I come."

There were several more pages, filled with protestations of devotion, but with a veiled warning that she had trifled long enough, and ending with a request for a speedy reply as his plans of the next few weeks depended on her answer.

Still smiling with a mixture of amusement and pleasure, she went to the front gallery to watch for Fergus's return from the office. To her surprise, she found him seated, in an attitude of utter exhaustion, asleep. As she stood gazing at him with an undefined feeling of apprehension, scanning the gentle, refined face, now seamed with lines of care, he woke with a start and looked up at her.

"Tired?" she asked.

"A little," he replied.

Dismissing her fleeting anxiety, and seating herself on the arm of his chair, she said, "Guess from whom this is."

He turned the letter so as to see the superscription. "From Tom Ogers," he replied in a lifeless tone.

"Yes, from Tom," she replied with a gay little laugh, and not noticing his apparent lack of interest. "Funny, isn't it? He wants to come and visit us again—so as to see the grinding." Watching him smilingly as he turned the pages slowly and finally handed it back without comment, she slipped her arm around his neck, asserting rather than asking, "We're sure to pay our debts this season, aren't we?"

"No," he answered in a constrained voice, "I never expected to take up those notes in one year. I was assured there would be no difficulty in getting a renewal."

"Is there any difficulty?" she asked.

"Yes."

"There won't be when Tom comes," she assured him. "I'll arrange it."

"How do you propose to 'arrange' it?" he asked.

His tone startled her. Ronald, who no longer loved her, could be severe toward her, she reflected bitterly, but Fergus was different; he was never harsh. There was some reason for his change of manner. For the moment she felt abashed, but after a pause she said, "I can do it; and on some accounts I shall be glad to see him."

Fergus seemed scarcely to hear her. His eyes

looked beyond her with a strange absorption. The breathless heat pressed upon her and the metallic sound of hammering that reached her from the sugar house, mingling with the prolonged ringing of a locust near-by, seemed to intensify the sultry silence.

"There were things I liked about him," she observed, after waiting for some comment from Fergus. "He had good manners, and it was a pleasure to have some one to talk to — some one like the people I used to know. But he stayed too long, and I got tired." She paused, waiting for some word, but he maintained his austere silence. "I'll be more patient this time," she finally added. "I know I can persuade him."

Fergus now looked searchingly at her, but still uttered no word.

"I know I've been hateful and perverse and all that," she suddenly burst out; "I don't need any one to tell me so."

"Has any one told you so?" he asked.

"Not in words," she replied, "but Ronald goes around with such an accusing air —"

"I never observed it."

"I suppose it would be nearer the truth to say he ignores my existence," she corrected herself, trying to say it lightly, and without betraying her vexation, in the hope of drawing some word of justification from Fergus; but he remained silent.

Rising from the arm of his chair, she walked to the end of the gallery and looked toward the flaming west. From behind masses of purple clouds, like lights shin-

ing through half-closed blinds, there streamed rays of burning orange and crimson. The China tree which shaded that end of the gallery with its thick, plummy foliage, so dark it was almost black in the shade, now glowed in the vivid light with iridescent, bronze tints.

"Any how," she resumed with a forced laugh, "Tom doesn't ignore me. He wants to come back — 'to make everything right.' I don't know what he means by that."

"I do."

She was leaning on the railing, fanning herself with the letter, but at Fergus's words she turned and looked at him. In the vivid light, his face was of a waxen pallor, strange and ghastly. "What do you mean, Fergus?" she asked. Then, frightened by his look and manner, she went swiftly to him and laying her hand on his shoulder, cried, "What is it, Fergus? What has Tom done?"

"He has ruined us."

"Ruined us!" she repeated, her face blanching. "How has he ruined us?"

"I have learned — within the hour —" he answered breathlessly as if strength failed him, "he has sold the mortgage notes to Tobias Blaise. They say Blaise hates me —"

"Tobias Blaise!" she repeated with bloodless lips, "Tobias Blaise! In the power of that dangerous man! Oh, Fergus!" (It was a piercing cry.) "I have ruined you."

He made no reply.

Tremblingly she twisted her fingers together whispering, "Oh, why wouldn't I make friends with those people while I had the chance? Oh, what have I done! What have I done! Fergus, what will he do to us?"

"He will foreclose and turn us out."

She wrung her hands. "I could have saved you," she cried. "I could, and I wouldn't."

He put his hand to his head. "There ought to be some way," he muttered.

"There is a way," she cried passionately, and broke into wild weeping.

XXXII

IT was nearly morning when Catherine, who had fallen into a doze after lying for hours gazing with sleepless eyes into the darkness, awoke with a start, hearing a human voice ringing in her ears. The cry was repeated and as she roused more fully she could feel the house trembling in the clutch of the wind. Above the roar of the lashing trees, which was like the roar of the sea, she heard a prolonged, deep growl, unutterably awful; the voice of the tempest itself. Then there mingled with it a keen whistle as if the black huntsman, riding on the blast, were whistling to his hounds. All the forces of the night and of the storm were let loose. And again, the piercing shriek of the wind, as it found some crevice or keyhole.

"Fergus!" she cried, running to his door, "Fergus! don't you hear some one calling?"

"No," he answered, "it's the wind."

She tried to light her candle, but a gust from the open window blew out the flame and dressing hurriedly in the darkness she groped her way into the hall where she found him waiting with a lighted lantern. He stood in a listening attitude.

"Hark!" she said, as a wild, wailing cry seemed to echo through the house, "some one is calling."

"No," he repeated, "it's the wind."

The lantern flickered and went out in the draft that came souging down the stairway, and some papers left on the table the evening before, flew, rustling, about the hall with a ghostly suggestion of wings.

Gropingly, she felt for Fergus and clung to him. As she stood so, waiting, listening, she dared not think for what, she felt the pressure of the gale against the door and the long, flanking windows.

She listened, expectantly, her eyes searching the darkness of the stairway, and finally asked, "Where is Ronald?"

"He went down to Octave Robichaux's. He should have been back last evening."

She pressed her hand against her breast. What if she never saw him again! If she never had the chance to take back the many unkind things she had said! Now, too late, she saw clearly her own selfishness and perversity, and suffered the poignant anguish of remorse. How kind — how truly kind — he had been! How wise in trying to save her from her own follies! And kind toward that poor boy — All in vain! Everything had happened as he foresaw. "Oh, Ronald! Ronald!" throbbed and beat in her brain. "If only you come back!"

Her mind, like a broken mirror that catches here and there a disconnected reflection, glanced over her past life. She saw herself a child in her luxurious home, with servants to do her bidding, with every whim indulged — yet never satisfied. Then as a queen,

scorning the honors heaped upon her. Always dissatisfied! Nothing had ever been sufficient for her. She had broken her toys and thrown them away; she had broken hearts and tossed them aside.

Feeling his way, Fergus drew her to the settle, as one might a child, and so they sat without speaking while the wind rose in a long crescendo as if the spirits of all the broken hearted, all who had died without hope, were uttering their lament.

A vivid crimson flashed through her closed eyelids, and the house rocked in the reverberation of the thunder. In the hollow silence that followed she heard the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece.

At last the darkness grew faintly luminous. Outside the windows fantastic shadows tossed themselves about. The leaden dawn turned to a paler gray and through the blinding rain the daylight struggled. The shadows became branches of trees whirling in a witches' dance.

"Another day," she said.

Fergus rose and went to the window. She knew for whom he was watching, and followed him. Three weird figures, their bodies braced against the storm, their heads covered with rice sacks, came toward the house, plodding heavily through the rain-soaked earth. They were Marcelline, Ananias and Pidgeon.

"They are fairly risking their lives!" Fergus exclaimed and opening the door went out on to the gallery to speak to them. Catherine followed, close behind, and the door closed with a jarring crash. But

the three, deafened by the wind and blinded by the rain and the muffling rice sacks, had already gone around the corner of the house without hearing or seeing those on the gallery.

Cowering back into the window niche, Catherine clung to Fergus who tried to shield her from the rain which was blinding, stinging like whips, beating upon her as with stones. For a moment it shut her in like a wall, then it lifted again and she had a glimpse of the fields, on which the cane lay flat — the beautiful cane that had been so tall and plummy only the day before. The fences were down and frightened cattle were running for shelter. She looked at the great China tree — it was lying on the ground, its lovely foliage torn and beaten into the mud. Across uprooted trees whose broken branches were scattered over the garden, she saw the place where the church had stood. The priest's house still crouched in safety, and to the left, beyond the bridge, she dimly discerned Miss Victorine's behind its sheltering orange trees. The bayou rolled along, brimming and flecked with foam. A log swept by upon its waves, then an overturned boat, then a roof with something clinging to it; something that moved feebly. She covered her face with her hands.

From far away, there came a faint, metallic sound. Fergus raised his head and listened. Again, far off, faint, but unmistakable. Both knew what it meant. the smoke stacks were falling. The smoke stacks, bought and put up at so much sacrifice! But what

did it matter? What did loss, or ruin, matter any more? Oh, if only Ronald would come!

Later, when she was lying, exhausted, on her bed, she heard Fergus in the hall, talking with Ananias, who was trying to build a fire.

She listened as in a dream, so weak from the long mental strain that she seemed to herself to be no longer in this world, but in the borderland of that strange, mysterious continent of which we know nothing, but toward which we grope half reluctant, half eager. "Am I still living," she questioned, "or is this death?"

The hours passed. Another night, and the howling of the storm. How could the frail shelters man had made withstand the fury of the tempest!

Toward morning, there came a knocking at the door: an awful sound at that hour and in such darkness. The servants, unable to get back to their cabins across the broken bridge, huddled in a frightened group, while Fergus, lantern in hand, unlocked the door and Catherine, with blanched face, came silently into the hall.

The door opened, and Ronald entered.

With a stifled gasp she went toward him.

"You are alive!" Fergus exclaimed.

"Yes, I am alive." Ronald's face showed his agitation as he looked from one to the other. Then going to the fire and seating himself wearily, he spread out his benumbed hands to the blaze.

"How did you get here?" Fergus asked, steadying

his voice with an effort. Catherine, behind Ronald's chair, wept silently.

"Robichaux brought me part way," Ronald answered, "but something happened to the boat at Beau Rivage, Évariste Ledoux's place. I think it began to leak, but, to tell the truth, I was so anxious about you and Catherine I scarcely noticed what the trouble was. Come nearer to the fire, Cathie," and, turning, he looked at her wan face. "You've been terribly frightened," he said.

"Not for myself," she answered faintly.

"Robichaux's house was not washed away?" Fergus asked.

"No, the floating prairie saved it — but it hindered him in getting his boat out. It is a miracle about that floating prairie," he added. "You remember it, don't you? Miles and miles of vegetation floating on the top of the water. It seems as if the whole prairie rose and swept toward us — and that is what saved us from drowning."

Catherine shuddered but said not a word.

"The vegetation completely surrounded the house so that the waves no longer broke over." Plainly, he was talking to recover his composure, and the sound of his voice betrayed his exhaustion.

"But how did you come the rest of the way?" Fergus asked.

"I got a mule at Beau Rivage. The road is so flooded I had to take a roundabout way back of the Settlement."

"The Settlement is standing?"

"Yes, the floating prairie saved that too."

"So the Lirettes are safe?"

"Yes. Jacques is not there. He had a chance to go away some days ago. He must be on the ocean now." He did not glance at Catherine as he spoke.

She listened in silent self-condemnation, not needing to be told why the poor boy had gone.

"So the road is not washed out?" Fergus asked, making no comment on what Ronald had said about Jacques.

"Oh, yes, there is no road left. But any way, the mule gave out at Bonvillain's and I had to leave it there."

"Then how did you get here?"

"I walked."

"You walked!" It seemed incredible. "How could —"

"I want to tell you something," Ronald interposed as if he shrank from speaking of the terrible effort he had made. "I think your troubles are ended."

"*Your* troubles." Catherine noticed the wording. So he was going to carry out his threat of leaving them? After all they had endured of agony, of mortal peril, he was still going to leave them!

"How can our troubles be ended?" Fergus asked.

"Ledoux told me an amazing thing. He has bought the mortgage notes on Espérance."

"He has bought them!" Fergus and Catherine exclaimed in a breath.

"Yes, and he told me that, if for no other reason, he wished to buy them for the sake of Félicie Trosclair, whom he has legally adopted. He said he hoped to prove his gratitude for your kindness to her, Catherine."

"My kindness!" she repeated. "Have I ever been 'kind' to any one?" She covered her eyes with her hand and the tears trickled between her fingers.

"It seems Père Ignace told him of some plan of yours for her protection, and Ledoux was deeply grateful to you. He's a rich man, and a kind one." Then, rising, he said, "Will you come up with me, Fergus, while I get on something dry? I must catch that morning train. You must have the riggers here to put up those smoke stacks as soon as possible."

"Oh, Ronald," Catherine faltered, "you can't go to the city to-day. You'd be risking your life again."

"I promised Ledoux I would go," he answered quietly as he began mounting the stairs.

A half hour later, as Catherine was returning to the hall with Marcelline who was carrying a tray, she heard Ronald coming down.

"So I shall answer the letter in person," he was saying.

"I shall miss you," Fergus declared.

"And I shall miss you — every day, Fergus. You have been the strongest influence for good in my life."

Wide-eyed, Catherine gazed at him as if trying to impress upon her memory a last glimpse; as we watch the fading form of some one upon a ship that is sailing

away from us forever. Yes, he was leaving them — now, when they had just been restored to each other.

"How kind of you, Catherine," he said, seating himself upon the settle before which they had arranged his breakfast. "Will you pour my coffee?" It seemed as if he were trying to fill the time with commonplace matters, as when we bid good-by to a friend, and, all our messages uttered, are conscious of a blank in the overlapping minutes.

Marcelline brought a plate of corn bread and placed it upon the tray and Fergus, drawing a chair to the fireplace, sat down. Catherine's hands shook so as she tried to put the sugar into the cup that she sprinkled it all around.

Gently, Ronald took the spoon from her hand. "You're tired out," he said. She should always remember the tone, it seemed to her; that deep, gentle, comforting tone.

"She hasn't eaten for two days," said Fergus.

"You must take care of yourself, Cathie." How kindly he spoke; and after all he had had to forgive.

Her eyelids smarted, but she restrained her tears. "You won't try to walk to Bergerac, will you?" she asked, refusing the plate he offered her.

"No," he answered, "I think the storm is abating so I can go in the boat. And now," he said, rising, "I must say good-by to the servants."

She watched him as he left the hall. Ananias came down the stairs carrying a trunk. She stood in the dim light, waiting for Ronald's return. She would tell

him as soon as he came back. But with him came Fergus, and behind them Pidgeon and Marcelline.

"Good-by, Catherine."

"Good-by, Ronald."

He was gone. She had lost her opportunity.

With a sudden cry, she tore open the door. She must tell him. She must speak. The sun was rising, and she saw the two figures nearing the gate.

"Ronald! Ronald!" she called, but her voice was drowned in the wind. No! No! He must not go without hearing her. "Ronald!" she repeated, running, struggling after him.

And now he heard. Wonderingly, he turned and came back to her.

"Ronald!" It was a lamentable, heart-broken tone. "You know — don't you — that I'm sorry? I never, never meant it. Oh, I've been a fool! A fool! You will come back, won't you?"

He looked down at her white, tear-wet face. Was this a passing mood? A whim of the moment?

"Oh, Ronald," she repeated, "don't you see I am *asking* you to come back? Don't you know that I love you?"

Without a word, he took her in his arms.

"I reckon the storm are past," Ananias said to Fergus who was standing on the bank, waiting. "Look yonder! A spot er blue sky." He gave his characteristic chuckle. "'Twon't be long now befo' the sun pull the cane up a-standin' agin."

Pidgeon's voice, carried by the wind, reached them

fitfully from the side yard where he was chopping kindling for Marcelline. In a high, piercing treble, he sang:

"The grindin' season has came to a end,
An' yo' back are broke ef it wouldn't bend,
'Case you has to wuk every day God send,
An' it ain't no use complainin'.

"We has had weather of every kind,
For the clouds has rained an' the sun has shined,
But the sugar are sweet when the cane you grind,
An' it ain't no use complainin'."

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